A NOTEWORTHY DETECTIVE STORY

THE MARATHON MYSTERY

7th Printing

BURTON E. STEVENSON

The Next Book to Read

The Cleverest of Automobile Stories

THE PRINCESS PASSES

By C. N. and A. M. WILLIAMSON

A continuation of that very popular book "The Lightning Conductor."

With Sixteen full page Illustrations.

Cover Design by
R. HOLMES

Paper 75c. Cloth $1.25

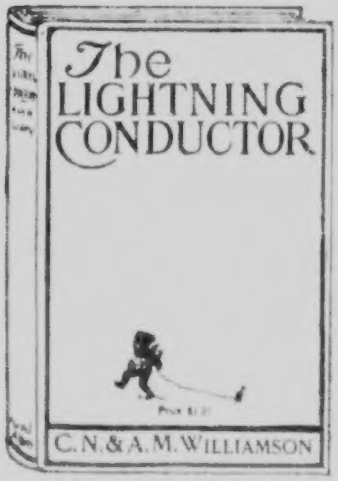
At Your Dealers or the Publishers

McLEOD & ALLEN, PUBLISHERS, TORONTO

THE LIGHTNING CONDUCTOR

By C. N. and A. M. WILLIAMSON

Authors of
"THE PRINCESS PASSES"



An Anglo-American automobile love story with vivid scenes in France, Spain and Italy. There is much humor. "Such delightful people and such delightful scenes."

Paper 75c. Cloth $1.25

At Your Dealers or the Publishers

McLEOD & ALLEN, PUBLISHERS, TORONTO

THE MARATHON MYSTERY

The Holladay Case

A MYSTERY OF NEW YORK AND ETRETAT

By BURTON E. STEVENSON

With Frontispiece by ELIOT KEEN. 12mo. $1.25

This is one of the new and artistic style of detective stories, somewhat in the vein of Conan Doyle. It is now in its fifth American impression, and has been republished in England. The tale begins with the finding of a New York banker stabbed to death in his office. Suspicion falls on his daughter. A kidnapping and pursuit over seas follow. The story contains a minimum of horror and a maximum of ingenuity.

N. Y. Tribune: "The reader will not want to put the book down until he has reached the last page. Well written into the bargain."

Springfield Republican: "Unusually clever."

Critic: "Almost instantly commands the reader's attention."

Boston Transcript: "Developed with novelty and originality . . . may be heartily commended."

Chicago Record-Herald: "Conan Doyle and Anna Katharine Green have a worthy rival in Burton E. Stevenson."

Buffalo Commercial: "Of rare interest and intricacy."

Washington Post: "Extremely clever."

Henry Holt and Company

PUBLISHERS *NEW YORK*

National Library of Canada
Bibliothèque nationale du Canada

THE NATIONAL LIBRARY of CANADA ♦ LA BIBLIOTHÈQUE NATIONALE du CANADA ♦

Canada

The Rainy Night.

The Marathon Mystery

A STORY OF MANHATTAN

BY

BURTON E. STEVENSON

AUTHOR OF "THE HOLLADAY CASE," "CADETS OF GASCONY," ETC.

With Five Scenes in Colour
BY ELIOT KEEN

TORONTO
McLEOD & ALLEN
PUBLISHERS

PS3537
T476
M37
1904
P***

COPYRIGHT, 1904
BY
HENRY HOLT AND COMPANY

Published October, 1904; reprinted November, 1904 (twice);
January, February, March, 1905

THE MERSHON COMPANY PRESS,
RAHWAY, N. J.

09501195

CONTENTS

PART I

THE TRAGEDY IN SUITE FOURTEEN

CHAPTER		PAGE
I.	A Call in the Night	3
II.	A Tangled Web	9
III.	Tricks of the Trade	17
IV.	The Janitor's Story	24
V.	Simmonds Snares a Bird	34
VI.	Light from a New Angle	41
VII.	A Glimpse at a Skeleton	51
VIII.	The Fog Thickens	60

PART II

CECILY

I.	A Change of Lodgings	77
II.	A Cry for Help	86
III.	A Break in a Circle	95
IV.	The Problem of the Diamond	102
V.	A Flash from the Depths	111
VI.	A Trap for Tremaine	119
VII.	Success and Failure	128

PART III

THE AFFAIR OF THE NECKLACE

I.	The Delroys	139
II.	The Gauntlet	147

CHAPTER PAGE
III. A Crossing of Swords 154
IV. Cut and Thrust 163
V. The Blow Falls 172
VI. The Mystery at the Pier 182
VII. A Tightening Coil 190
VIII. The Hand of the Law 197

PART IV

DAWN

I. A Thread Breaks 209
II. Treasure Trove! 217
III. A Study in Probabilities 225
IV. Cechy Says Good-bye 238
V. Counsel for the Defence 251
VI. Innocent or Guilty? 260
VII. The Key to the Mystery 269

PART V

DAY!

I. What Happened in Suite Fourteen 279
II. A Gathering of Threads 291
III. Godfrey and I are "de Trop" 299
IV. The Story of Monday Night 304
V. A Horror in the Dark 313
VI. Vengeance 319

SCENES IN COLOUR

By ELIOT KEEN

The Rainy Night . . . . . *Frontispiece*

In the Foyer 77

The Storm on Great South Bay 139

The Beach at Martinique at Sunset . . . 209

The River at Night 279

PART I

THE TRAGEDY IN SUITE FOURTEEN

THE MARATHON MYSTERY

CHAPTER I

A Call in the Night

A SUDDEN gust of wind wrenched the door from Godfrey's grasp and slammed it with a bang that echoed through the building.

"Anything doing?" he asked, as he flapped the rain from his coat.

Simmonds, the grizzled veteran of the Central Office, now temporarily in charge of the devious business of the "Tenderloin," shook his head despondently.

"Not a thing. Only," he added, his eyes gleaming suddenly with appreciation, "you were right about that Delanne abduction case. It was all a faked-up story on the mother's part. She confessed this evening."

"I thought she would if you kept at her," said Godfrey, sitting down with a quick nod of satisfaction "She hasn't nerve enough to carry through a thing like that—she's too pink-and-white. How does it happen you're alone?"

"Johnston's gone down to Philadelphia to bring back Riggs, the forger. Fleming's got the grip. Bad night, ain't it?"

"Horrible!" agreed Godfrey. "Listen to that, now."

A gust of extra violence howled down the street, rattling the windows, shrieking around the corners, tearing down signs, and doing such other damage as lay in its power.

There was a certain similarity in the faces of the two men, especially in the expression of the eyes and mouth. Age, however, had given to Simmonds's features a trace of stolidity which was wanting in those of his companion. He had been connected with the Central Office for many years—was dean of the force, in fact—and though he had developed no special genius in his dealings with crime, he possessed a matter-of-fact industry and personal courage which had frequently achieved success. In the end, his chief had come to trust him greatly, probably because the brilliant theorists of the force made so many unfortunate mistakes.

Godfrey was a brilliant theorist and something more. He was not so patient as Simmonds, but then he was much younger. He had more imagination, and perhaps his greatest weakness was that he preferred picturesque solutions to commonplace ones. During his three years' connection with the force he had won four or five notable victories—so notable, indeed, that they attracted the attention of the *Record* management. The end of it was that Godfrey resigned his badge and entered the *Record* office as criminal expert, climbing gradually to the position of star reporter. Since then, the *Record* had not waited on the police; indeed, it had been rather the other way around.

It was with Simmonds that Godfrey had long since concluded an alliance offensive and defensive. The

one supplemented the other—the eagle gave eyes to the mole; the mole gave the eagle the power of working patiently in the dark. Simmonds kept Godfrey in touch with police affairs; Godfrey enabled Simmonds to make a startling arrest now and then. Godfrey got the story, Simmonds got the glory, and both were satisfied. It may be added that, without in the least suspecting it, the mole was considerably under the influence of the eagle. Brains naturally lead industry; besides, the blind must have guidance.

They listened until the gust of wind died away down the street, then Godfrey arose and began to button up his coat.

"Nevertheless," he said, "I've got to be moving on. I can't stay loafing here. I wouldn't have stopped at all but for the chance of seeing you."

"Oh, don't [illegible]," protested Simmonds. "I was mighty glad to [illegible] you come in. I was feeling a little lonesome. Wait till this squall's over, anyway—and have a smoke."

Godfrey took the proffered cigar and relapsed into his chair.

"I'm only human," he said, as he struck a match, "and, besides, there's a fascination about you, Simmonds—there's always a chance of getting a good story out of you. You know more about the criminal history of New York than any other man living, I think."

Simmonds chuckled complacently.

"I *have* been in on most of the big cases," he agreed.

"Come, now," continued the other persuasively,

"if I consent to stay, you've got to produce a story. Take those big cases—which do you think was the best of the lot?"

"The best?"

"The most intricate, I mean—the most puzzling, the hardest to solve."

"Well," and Simmonds rolled his cigar reflectively, "the hardest to solve, of course, were those that were never solved at all. There was the shooting of old Benjamin Nathan, in the summer of '70, at his house on West Twenty-third Street, and there was the stabbing of Harvey Burdell. I never had the least doubt that Burdell was killed by Mrs. Cunningham, the woman he'd secretly married. The stabbing was done by a left-handed person, and she was left-handed; but we weren't able to convict her."

"Yes," nodded Godfrey; "and the Nathan case?"

"There wasn't anybody in the house, so far as known, but the two sons," said Simmonds slowly, "and both of them managed to prove an alibi. But I've always thought—— Hello! What's this?"

The door flew back with a crash and a man rushed in—a heavy-set man, with red cheeks, who stopped, gasping, clutching at his throat.

Godfrey had a flask to his lips in an instant.

"Come, brace up!" he commanded sternly, slapping the stranger on the back. "Take a swallow of this—that's it."

"It seems to me I know him," remarked Simmonds, looking at the flushed countenance with contemplative eye.

"O' course you do!" gasped the stranger. "I'm

Higgins—th' Marathon," and he jerked his head toward the door.

"Oh, yes," said Simmonds. "You're the janitor of the Marathon apartment house, just across the street."

"Well, what's happened at the Marathon?" demanded Godfrey. "No ghosts over there, I hope."

"There'll be one," answered Higgins, his eyes beginning to pop again. "Oh, my God!"

"Come," repeated Godfrey sharply. "Out with it! What is it?"

"It's murder, that's what it is!" cried Higgins hoarsely. "I seed him, a-layin' on his back—"

He stopped and covered his eyes with his hands. Simmonds had quietly opened a drawer and slipped a revolver into his pocket. Then he took down the receiver from his desk 'phone.

"That you, sergeant?" he called. "This is Simmonds. Send three men over to the Marathon right away."

He put back the receiver with a jerk. Godfrey twirled the janitor sharply around in the direction of the door.

"Go ahead," he commanded, and pushed rather than led him out into the storm.

They made a dash for it through the rain, which was still pouring in torrents. Halfway across the street, they descried a cab standing at the farther curb, and veered to the right to avoid it.

"Here we are," said Higgins, running up a short flight of steps into a lighted vestibule. "It's in soot fourteen—second floor."

They sprang up the stairs without thinking of the elevator—one flight, two . . . Higgins began to choke again.

A single door stood open, throwing a broad glare of light across the hallway.

" It's there," said Higgins, and stopped to gasp for breath.

The others ran on. For an instant, they stood upon the threshold, gazing into the room—at a huddled form on the floor, with a red stain growing and growing upon its breast—at a woman staring white-faced from the farther corner—a woman, tall, with black hair and black eyes.

Then Godfrey stepped toward her with a quick exclamation of surprise, incredulity, horror.

" Why, it's Miss Croydon! " he said.

CHAPTER II

A Tangled Web

SIMMONDS had dropped on one knee beside the body. He was up again in an instant.

"No need for an ambulance," he said tersely "He's dead."

The words seemed to rouse the girl from the ecstasy of horror which possessed her, and she buried her face in her hands, shuddering convulsively. Godfrey caught her as she swayed forward, and led her gently to a chair.

"Perhaps you don't remember me, Miss Croydon," he said. "Godfrey's my name—it was only the other night at Mrs. Delroy's I met you. It was Jack Drysdale who introduced me—you know I'm an old friend of his."

"Yes," she murmured indistinctly, "I remember quite——"

An exclamation from Simmonds interrupted her. He had picked up a small, pearl-handled revolver from the floor in the corner.

"Is this yours, miss?" he asked.

She nodded faintly.

He snapped it open and looked at the chambers. One had been discharged. He sniffed at the barrel, then held it out to Godfrey. The odour of burnt gunpowder was plainly discernible.

Godfrey's face hardened as he turned to the janitor, who had regained his breath and stood staring on the threshold.

"My friend," he said, "shut the door——"

He stopped as he heard the tramp of heavy feet approaching along the corridor.

"Wait," said Simmonds. "There come my men. I'll be back in a minute."

Godfrey nodded curtly, and waited until Simmonds closed the door after him.

"Now, Miss Croydon," he said, "tell me quickly how it happened. I can't help you unless I know the whole story, and I want to help you."

The gentleness of his voice, the quiet assurance of his manner, the encouraging glance, combined to calm and strengthen her. She sat up, with an effort of self-control, and clasped her hands together in her lap.

"There isn't much to tell," she began, striving to speak steadily. "I came here to—to keep an appointment——" She stopped, her voice dying away, unable to go on.

"With this man?" asked Godfrey. "Who is he?"

"I don't know," and she cast a horrified glance at the huddled form. "I never saw him before."

"Then it wasn't he you came here to meet?"

"No—that is—it may have been——" And again she stopped.

"Miss Croydon," said Godfrey, gently yet clearly, "I can't help you unless you're quite frank with me, and I fear you are going to stand in need of help. Did you kill this man?"

"No!" she cried. "Oh, no!"

Her face was in her hands again and she was trembling; it was impossible to doubt that she spoke the truth.

"Then who did?"

There was no answer; only a dry, convulsive sobbing.

As Godfrey paused to look at her, the door opened and Simmonds came in. He closed it and snapped the lock.

"There's a policeman outside and one at each landing," he announced. "We'll look things over here, and then search the building. First, let's look at the body."

It was lying partly on its back, partly on its right side, with its legs doubled under it. The face was a bearded one, rough, coarse, and a little bloated—not a prepossessing face under any circumstances, and actively repulsive now, with its gaping mouth and widely staring eyes. It was tanned and seamed by exposure to wind and rain and there was a deep scar across the left temple.

"Between fifty and sixty years of age," remarked Godfrey. "Pouf! smell the whiskey."

Then, looking into the staring eyes, he uttered a sudden exclamation.

"See there, Simmonds, how the right pupil's dilated. Do you know what that means?"

Simmonds shook his head.

"No, I can't say I do."

"It means," said Godfrey, "that somebody hit this fellow a hard blow on the left side of the head and [illegible] the brain."

Simmonds gave a little low whistle.

"That could hardly have been her," and he nodded toward the girl, who had regained her self-control and was leaning anxiously forward, eyes and ears intent.

"No, of course not. Let's see if he was really shot."

They stripped back the shirt from the breast. A little blood was still welling from a wound just over the heart.

"That's what did the business," observed Simmonds, "and at close range, too; see there," and he pointed to the red marks about the wound. "He wasn't shot from the corner, that's sure. Let's see what he's got in his pockets."

The examination was soon made. There were only a pipe, a knife, a package of cheap tobacco, a handful of loose coins, and an old pocket-book containing a little roll of newspaper clippings and a receipt for a month's rent for suite fourteen made out to "H. Thompson."

"Thompson," repeated Simmonds, "and a lot of clippings. Can you read French, Godfrey?"

"A little," answered Godfrey modestly. "Let me see." He took the clippings and looked at the first one. "'Suresnes, September 16, 1891,'" he read haltingly. "'I have to report an event the most interesting which has just happened here, and which proves again the futility of vows the most rigorous to quiet the ardent desires of the human heart or to change the [illegible]'"

"Oh, well," interrupted Simmonds, "we can't waste

time reading any more of that rot; it sounds like a French novel. The coroner can wrestle with it, if he thinks it's worth while."

He replaced the clippings in the purse, which he slipped back into the pocket from which he had taken it.

"Now," he added, rising to his feet, "we'd better get the girl's story."

"Do you know who she is?" asked Godfrey, in a low voice. As he glanced at her, he was startled to note her attitude of strained attention, which, as he turned, lapsed instantly to one of seeming apathy.

"I heard you call her Miss Croydon."

"Yes—she's the sister of Mrs. Richard Delroy."

Again Simmonds whistled.

"The deuce you say! Dickie Delroy! Well, that doesn't make any difference," and he turned toward her resolutely.

"Miss Croydon," he began abruptly, though perhaps in a gentler voice than he would have used toward the average suspect, "were you in the room when this man was killed?"

"Yes, sir."

"You know him?"

"Only slightly," she answered coolly, disregarding Godfrey's stare of amazement. "His name, I think, was Thompson."

"You had an engagement with him here?"

"Yes, sir; on a private matter which cannot concern the police."

Simmonds passed that over for the moment.

"Will you kindly tell us just what happened?" he asked.

"I drove here in a cab," she said, speaking rapidly, "which I told to wait for me. In the vestibule, I met the janitor, and asked to be conducted to suite fourteen. He brought me up here where Mr.—Mr. Thompson was waiting. I entered and closed the door. We were talking together, when the door of the inner room opened and a man came out. Before I realised what he was doing, he had raised a bar of iron he held in his hand and struck Mr. Thompson upon the head. Then, standing over him, he drew a revolver and fired one shot at him. I had shrunk away into the corner, but thinking him a madman, believing my own life in danger, I drew my pocket-pistol and fired at him. Without even glancing at me, he opened the outer door and disappeared. The janitor rushed in a moment later."

"Did your shot hit him?" asked Simmonds.

"I don't know; I think not; he showed no sign of being wounded."

Simmonds stood looking at her; Godfrey turned to an examination of the opposite wall.

"Miss Croydon's shot went wild," he said, curiously elated at this confirmation of her story. "Here's the bullet," and he pointed to it, embedded in the woodwork of the bedroom door.

Simmonds took a look at it, then he returned to the inquiry.

"Did you know this intruder?" he asked.

"No, sir; I'd never before seen him," she answered steadily.

"Will you describe him?"

She closed her eyes, seemingly in an effort at recollection.

"He was a short, heavy-set man," she said, at last, "with a dark face and dark moustache which turned up at the ends. That is all I can remember."

"And dressed how?"

"In dark clothes; he wore a slouch hat, I think, drawn down over the eyes. I didn't see the face clearly."

The answer came without hesitation, but it seemed to Godfrey that there was in the voice an accent of forced sincerity.

"What did he do with the bar of iron?" asked Simmonds.

"As soon as he struck the blow, I think he—he threw it down. I remember hearing it fall—"

"Yes—here it is," said Godfrey triumphantly, and fished it out from under a chair which stood near the wall. "But see, Simmonds—it's not a bar, it's a pipe."

Simmonds examined it. It was an ordinary piece of iron piping, about fifteen inches in length.

"Her story seems to be straight," he said, in an undertone to Godfrey. "What do you think about it?"

"I think she's perfectly innocent of any crime," answered Godfrey, with conviction. He had his doubts as to the absolute straightness of her story, but he concluded to keep them to himself.

"Well, there's nothing more to be learned out here," remarked Simmonds, after another glance around.

"Suppose we take a look at the other room," and he led the way toward the inner door.

It was an ordinary bedroom of moderate size and with a single closet, in which a few soiled clothes were hanging. The bed had been lain upon, and evidently by a person fully dressed, for there were marks of muddy shoes upon the counterpane, fresh marks as of one who had come in during the evening's storm. An empty whiskey bottle lay on a little table near the bed.

"I guess Thompson was a boozer," observed Simmonds.

"Yes," agreed Godfrey, "his face showed that pretty plainly."

"Well, the man we're after ain't in here; we'll have to search the house."

"Can't we let Miss Croydon go home? She won't run away—I'll answer for that. Besides, there's nothing against her."

Simmonds pondered a minute.

"Yes, I suppose so," he said, at last. "Of course, she'll have to appear at the inquest. Do you know her address?"

"Yes—twenty-one East Sixty-ninth Street."

Simmonds jotted it down in his note-book.

"All right," he said. "You'd better take her down to her cab."

CHAPTER III

Tricks of the Trade

GODFREY turned aside to hide the smile of satisfaction he could not wholly suppress; he had been adroitly driving Simmonds toward that suggestion.

For Godfrey wanted to be alone a few minutes with Miss Croydon. He was acutely conscious that here was a mystery much more puzzling than appeared on the surface; much more picturesque than the ordinary run of mysteries. Miss Croydon had said that her errand to suite fourteen had been on a private matter which did not concern the police, but Godfrey was not so sure of that. Of course, he could not compel her to explain it, and yet he felt that two or three well-directed questions might give him the clew which he was seeking now in vain.

"Very well," he agreed; "I'll see her down to her cab. What are you going to do?"

"I'm going to quiz the janitor and then search the house. Maybe the other fellow hasn't had a chance to get away yet. I wonder what's going on out there?" he added, as they returned together to the other room.

They could hear a commotion of some sort in the hall, the hum of many voices, the shuffling of many feet . . .

The commotion swelled to an uproar as Simmonds opened the door and closed it quickly behind him. Godfrey heard his voice raised in angry expostulation, and he chuckled grimly to himself as he turned to Miss Croydon.

He gazed at her with interest, searchingly, pondering how best to surprise her secret—at the bent head, with its crown of dark hair, shadowed by a little velvet hat; at the rounded arms, the graceful figure. The remarkable resolution and self-control with which she had answered the detective's inquiries seemed to have deserted her. She was sitting huddled up in the chair, with her head in her hands, in an attitude almost of collapse. A convulsive shudder shook her from moment to moment. They had been thoughtless, Godfrey told himself, to leave her alone with the dead man—that was enough to unnerve any woman.

He paused yet a moment, looking at her,—at the slender hands, the little ear,—and he pictured to himself what her training had been, how she had been fenced away from the rough places of the world, the unpleasant things of life. Certainly, she could never have committed such a crime as this, or even connived at it.

Yet she had lied—deliberately and distinctly she had lied. She had told him that she had never before seen the dead man; she had told Simmonds just the opposite. Which was the truth? Doubtless the first; her first impulse would be to speak the truth; afterward, at leisure for a moment, she had mastered her agitation, had thought out the lie, and had uttered it with a surprising calmness.

Godfrey felt that he was groping toward the light. But there was another mystery more impenetrable still. What was it had nerved her to brave the tittle-tattle of the world, to endanger her good name, to run she knew not what risk of indignity and insult? A love affair? Bah! To suppose her capable of such an assignation was preposterous. One had only to look at her to see that. And yet, what other reason could have brought her to this place, alone, on such a night . . .

Suddenly she felt the scrutiny he bent upon her, and raised her eyes to his. Then she straightened up, quickly, still looking at him, and he saw a flash of defiance in her eyes. Plainly, she did not fear him; he fancied there were few things in the world she did fear.

"May I see you to your cab, Miss Croydon?" he asked.

"To my cab?" she repeated, half-rising. "I may go, then? I am free? You have not . . ."

"Betrayed you?" he finished, as she stopped suddenly. "No; I don't intend to. Whether you know the man yonder or not, I don't for an instant believe you killed him."

"Oh, I didn't!" she cried. "I did my best to save him. But it was done so quickly—I didn't understand until too late."

"Nevertheless," continued Godfrey evenly, "I think you're wrong in trying to protect the scoundrel who did."

The colour faded suddenly from her face.

"To protect him?" she faltered.

"I'm sure you know him. You could place him in the hands of the police, if you wished."

She stared without answering into his steady eyes. There was something compelling in their glance, a power there was no resisting, urging her to speak. She had been deeply shaken by the evening's tragedy; her strength was almost gone. Godfrey saw her yielding, yielding—a moment more, and he would have the story. With a last sigh of resistance, she opened her lips, closed them, opened them again . . .

The door opened and a man came in—a keen-faced man of middle age, who nodded to Godfrey and threw a quick, penetrating glance at his companion. Behind him, the clamour burst out anew: various heads appeared in the doorway, various eager faces sought to peer into the room; but the newcomer calmly closed the door and assured himself that it was locked. He looked at Godfrey again, then expectantly at the girl.

"Miss Croydon," said Godfrey, "this is Coroner Goldberg, whose duty it is to investigate this affair, and who may wish to ask you some questions."

Goldberg removed his hat and bowed. Miss Croydon met his gaze with an admirable composure. Godfrey sighed—that moment of weakness was past—if Goldberg had only been a moment later!

"Only a few at present," began the coroner, in a voice soft and deferential, as only he knew how to make it. How often, with that voice, had he led a witness on and on to his own ruin! "You were the only witness of this tragedy, I believe, Miss Croydon?"

"Yes, sir."

"Are you acquainted with the murderer?"

"No, sir."

"You never saw him before?"

"No, sir."

"But you could identify him, if the police succeed in capturing him?"

"Oh, yes, sir."

"You have already given Mr. Simmonds a description of him?"

"Yes, sir; as well as I could."

"And told him the whole story?"

"Yes, sir—the whole story."

"Except one detail, I believe—you did not e[illegible]in how you came to be in this room."

"No, sir; I did not tell him that," she answered, in a low tone.

"Will you tell me?"

"I do not think it concerns the police, sir."

"You would better let me judge of that; if it does not concern the police, I promise you it shall go no farther."

She was looking at him anxiously; she moistened her lips and glanced uncertainly at Godfrey.

"Do you object to Mr. Godfrey's presence?" asked the coroner.

"Oh, not at all," she said quickly. "I'm very glad that Mr. Godfrey is here."

"I persist," continued Goldberg, "because I think that perhaps the story may help us to identify this man."

"It won't," said Miss Croydon; "but I will tell you—briefly, this man claimed to have certain—papers

which concerned—our family. We had never heard [illegible] of him before. We [illegible] anything about him [illegible] I came here—to see."

"You did a very imprudent thing," commented the coroner.

"I see it now," agreed Miss Croydon humbly. "I [illegible] the advice [illegible]."

"[illegible] I knew you were [illegible]."

"Oh, yes; and tried [illegible]. But I am sometimes—well—a little obstinate, I fear," she went on, with just the ghost of a smile, and a [illegible] which seemed to Godfrey a trifle excessive. "I shall [illegible] forget the lesson."

Goldberg nodded, still looking at her. Godfrey wondered if he, too, suspected that there [illegible] thing hidden behind the [illegible]. He [illegible] keen acumen heightened by a certain [illegible] of imagination. But, apparently, [illegible]

"That is all, at present," he said. "Now, if [illegible] he'd go no farther. Mr. Godfrey, I am sure, promises that, too."

"Certainly," assented Godfrey.

"Of course," the coroner added. "I shall have to summon you as a witness at the inquest. It will probably be to-morrow afternoon."

She bowed without replying.

"One thing more," said Goldberg. "Did he have the papers? Did he give them to you?"

"No," she answered quickly. "He had no papers. He was lying."

"Then that is all," repeated the coroner. "You'd better see her to her cab, Mr. Godfrey," he added, with a little smile. "She'll need an escort."

She rose from her chair and dropped over her face a heavy veil which she had raised about her hat. Godfrey opened the door for her and followed her through. She shrank back from the mob which charged down upon her as soon as she appeared on the threshold, but Godfrey sprang forward quickly to her rescue.

"Keep close to me," he said, and elbowed a way through the crowd with no great gentleness, deaf to exclamations of angry protest.

"It's Godfrey of the [illegible]!"

"Of course, he [illegible] like a [illegible]!"

"Well, he's [illegible]!"

"Madame, we beg of [illegible]!"

But Godfrey merely smiled grimly and kept straight on, holding his companion firmly by the arm. In a moment, they were down the stairs and at the door of the cab.

"Miss Croydon," he said, leaning toward her as she took her seat, "do me the favour to deny yourself to all callers to-night."

"I shall," she agreed instantly.

"Thank you," and he stepped back, smiling, as the driver whipped up his horse.

He smiled more broadly still when he saw three other cabs following the first [illegible]

"Now I call that enterprise!" he said to himself. Then he chuckled again.

CHAPTER IV

The Janitor's Story

GODFREY glanced at his watch. It was after nine o'clock. The rain had almost ceased, but the wind was still high. He turned back to the building and found the janitor sitting just inside the door. He had endured the ordeal of inquisition by police and reporters and was rather limp.

"May I use your telephone a moment?" asked Godfrey.

The janitor waved his hand toward the booth. Godfrey called up his office and asked that a photographer and an artist be sent up at once. The readers of the *Record* demanded illustrations with every story, and the paper always did its best to please them, at whatever cost of labour, ingenuity, or money. That done, Godfrey went back to the janitor and sat down beside him.

After all, he told himself, he had as yet only half the story; he must get every detail from this man, and he saw that it would be necessary to proceed delicately, for his companion's temper was evidently badly ruffled. He was a thick-set, choleric man, with a shortness of breath which perhaps argued some weakness of the heart. Godfrey studied him now for a moment before he ventured to open fire.

"Well," he began, at last, "you look as though those fellows had about worn you out. Mr. ——"

"Higgins is my name," said the janitor. "Simon Higgins."

"Oh, yes; I remember now. I suppose they asked you about a million questions?"

"A million!" echoed Higgins, with scorn. "Ten million 'd be more like it! But it wasn't so much that as that they wouldn't believe me when I told 'em a thing. They seemed t' think I was lyin'!"

Godfrey nodded sympathetically.

"That *does* get on a man's nerves," he agreed. "I feel a little upset, myself—won't you try a smoke?"

Higgins took the cigar.

"It's agin th' rules," he said, "but I don't keer; I need it," and he bit off the end.

They sat together for a moment in silence, listening to the tramp of feet in the halls overhead, the opening and closing of doors, the subdued murmur of voices. At the stair-foot, beyond the elevator, they caught a glimpse, now and then, of a policeman pacing back and forth.

"They're searchin' th' house," observed Higgins, at last, with a grimace of disdain. "I turned th' keys over t' them. Much they'll find!"

"Nobody there, eh?" It was not really a question; it seemed more a sign of polite interest on Godfrey's part.

"I ought t' know. I told 'em they wasn't nobody there. Ain't I been here all evenin' 'cept fer that minute I run acrost th' street? Nobody in nor out, 'cept th' girl—not since seven o'clock. That was about th' time that there blamed Thompson come in, too drunk t' stand. He'd never 'a' got home in th' world

by hisself, but they was a feller with him, a-holdin' him up."

Godfrey was listening with strained attention. There were many questions he wished to ask, but he dared not interrupt.

"Well, we got him upstairs atween us. An' then, when I went through his pockets, I couldn't find his key, an' I had t' come down an' git mine afore I could git his door open. We laid him on his bed an' left him there, a-snorin' like a hog. That feller who was with him was certainly a good sort. He set down here t' talk t' me a while—it was rainin' so hard he couldn't go—an' he said he'd run acrost Thompson down at Pete Magraw's place on Sixth Avenoo. Thompson was treatin' everybody an' actin' like a fool ginerally; then he got bad an' started t' clean out th' saloon, an' Pete was goin' t' call a cop, but this feller said he'd bring him home—an' so he did."

Higgins stopped to take breath, and Godfrey ventured to put a question.

"Did you know him?"

"No; I never seed him afore."

"What sort of a looking fellow was he?"

"A good-lookin' feller, well-dressed—no bum, I kin tell y' that. He was short an' heavy-set, with a little black moustache that turned up at th' ends."

Godfrey's heart gave a sudden leap—so Miss Crowdon had told the truth, after all! She was not trying to protect anybody. And the case was going to prove a simple one—he had been reading a mystery into it that it did not possess; that was always the danger with your theorist, he told himself, a little bitterly—he was

forever looking for hidden meanings, for abstruse clews, for picturesque solutions, instead of following the plainly evident, or accepting facts at their face value. Well, Simmonds certainly would not make that mistake; he would have little difficulty in finding his man.

"And then what happened?" he asked. "I suppose this fellow went away."

"Oh, no; he stayed here talkin' quite a while—he started t' go once or twice, but th' rain was too hard. But at eight o'clock he said he couldn't stay no longer, rain or no rain, an' was jest buttonin' up his coat, when a cab drove up an' a woman got out. She had a thick veil on, so's I couldn't see her face, but from her style I judged she was a lady, sure. She came up, 'mean' she says, 'I want t' go t' apartment fourteen—Mr. Thompson.' 'Madam,' says I, 'I couldn't if I was sure.' 'Why?' she asked, quick like, 'aren't he there?' 'He's there,' says I, 'but he isn't in no condition t' see a lady.' 'Never mind,' says she, 'I'll go up.' 'All right,' says I. 'I'll be back in a minute,' I added t' my friend. 'No,' he says, 'I can't wait. I must be goin',' an' he started toward th' door. 'Well, good night,' I says, an' stepped into th' cab an' started up.

I showed her th' door o' fourteen, an' she knocked. I was waitin' in th' elevator, for I knowed Thompson was too dead drunk t' hear her, an' I'd have t' take her down agin, when blessed if th' door didn't open an' in she walked. Well, sir, I was so humbfoundered I couldn't hardly keep my eyes—! But I did, an' I come down, tryin' t' get out. It was mighty

hard

minutes later that I heard a pistol-shot an' I knowed in a minute what 'd happened. That drunken brute had got too familiar, an' she'd put a bullet in him. Though," he added, reflectively, "why, if she's straight, she'd go t' his room at all is more'n I kin ..."

"Was there only one shot?" asked Godfrey.

"Only one," answered the janitor; "but it sounded like a small cannon. It didn't come from no sech little pop-gun as that which Mr. Simmonds picked up in th' corner. I rushed up th' stairs an' threw open th' door——"

"Wasn't it locked?"

"No; an' that's funny, too," he added, "fer I remember hearin' the lock snap after th' girl went in. Somebody must 'a' throwed it back ag'in. Mebbe th' girl did it, tryin' t' git out, an' Thompson got a-hold of her an' then she let him have it."

Godfrey nodded, with an appreciation seemingly very deep.

"That's it, no doubt," he said. "I see you're a lose reasoner, Mr. Higgins."

"Why," said Higgins, with a smile of self-satisfaction, "I allers have been able t' put two an' two t'gether. They's one thing, though, I can't explain. As I was rushin' up th' steps, I heard th' openin' an' shuttin' of a door."

"Ah," said Godfrey thoughtfully. "And there was no one in the hall?"

"Not a soul: not a soul in sight."

"Are you sure of that?"

"Sure! O' course I am. There's a light in th'

hall—an', anyway, they ain't no place anybody could hide."

"He might have gone into one of the other rooms, mightn't he?"

"They was all locked—I'm certain o' that."

Godfrey took a thoughtful puff or two.

"It was th' girl shot him—y' kin bank on that," added Higgins, with emphasis.

"But then," objected Godfrey, "you said the report you heard couldn't have come from her pistol."

Higgins gasped and choked, staring wide-eyed.

"Why, that's so!" he cried. "That's so! I never thought o' that! Mebbe there *is* a damn scoundrel hidin' 'round here some'rs," and he glanced excitedly up and down the hall.

"The police will find him if there is," said Godfrey reassuringly. "What happened after you reached the room?"

"Well," continued Higgins, quieting down a little, but still keeping one eye over his shoulder, "as I was sayin', I throwed open th' door, an' there was th' girl leanin' agin th' wall an' Thompson on th' floor with a big blood-spot on his shirt-front. I jest give one look at 'em an' then I went down th' steps three at a time an' over t' th' station. I tell you, it purty nigh done me up."

He was interrupted by a tramp of feet that came down the stairs. It was Simmonds and the coroner, closely attended by the crowd of reporters, who immediately surrounded Godfrey in threatening admiration.

"How did *you* happen to be here?" demanded Rankin of the *Planet*.

"Just luck," explained Godfrey, looking around the group with a pleasant smile.

"Does it mean another scoop?"

"Oh, no; not at all! I dare say you fellows know more about it now than I do."

"Oh, of course we do!" assented Rankin drily, amid derisive laughter.

"At least," Godfrey added, "Mr. Goldberg has all the facts and is probably willing to help you out."

"Yes," agreed the coroner; "but it's getting late, and I'm in a hurry—I'll give you ten minutes at my office," and he started toward the door.

"All right," said Rankin; "come on, boys," and they trooped out of the building together.

Simmonds waited until the last of them had disappeared.

"Well, we searched the house," he began.

"Nobody there?" asked Godfrey.

"Not a living soul. I didn't really expect to find anybody; but we went through every room—even to the suites which are occupied."

Higgins opened his mouth suddenly; then as suddenly closed it.

"Did you find the doors all locked?"

"Every one; the hall windows bolted on the inside and the trap in the roof hooked in place. There's only one way our man could get out—that was by the front door yonder," and Simmonds looked sharply at the janitor.

Higgins grew red in the face.

"I ain't got nothin' more t' say!" he burst out explosively. "You'll be sayin' I did it, next!"

"Oh, no," retorted Simmonds coolly, "you didn't do it. But I'm not quite sure you've told us all you know."

Higgins sprang from his chair, fairly foaming at the mouth with rage, but Simmonds calmly disregarded him.

"I've left a man on guard in fourteen," he said. "Goldberg wants to bring his jury around in the morning to look at things. Here's your keys," and he handed the jingling ring back to the janitor.

"There's a man coming up from the office to take a flash-light of it," said Godfrey. "No objection to that, I guess?"

"No; that's all right. Come around in the morning to talk it over. I think I'll have some news for you," and he went on out into the street.

Higgins sat down again, still nursing his wrath.

"Did y' hear him?" he demanded. "Why, he as good as called me a liar!"

"Oh, you mustn't mind him," said Godfrey soothingly. "It's his business to be suspicious. He doesn't really suspect you."

"Well, they ain't no cause t' suspect me—I ain't done nothin'," returned the janitor; then he looked meditatively at his keys, which he still held in his hand. "Funny," he murmured; "funny. I don't know when they went out."

Godfrey said nothing, but contemplated him through half-closed eyes.

At that instant the street door opened and a man and woman entered.

"There they come, now!" cried Higgins, springing to his feet. "Good-evenin', Mr. Tremaine."

"Good-evening," returned the stranger, in a voice singularly rich and pleasant.

"I was jest a-sayin' t' my friend here," added the janitor, "that I hadn't seen y' go out."

Godfrey, for an instant, found himself gazing into a pair of the keenest eyes he had ever encountered.

"You wished to see me?" asked Tremaine.

"Oh, no, no," interrupted Higgins; "but th' p'lice was goin' through th' buildin'——"

"The police?"

"Oh, I fergot—you don't know—that man Thompson's been murdered—he had th' soot right acrost th' hall from you."

"Murdered!" echoed Tremaine. "Murdered! Why, that's terrible! Who did it? How did it happen?"

Higgins retold the story with some unction, evidently enjoying his listener's horror. But Godfrey did not even glance at him. He was gazing—perhaps a shade too intently for politeness—at Mrs. Tremaine. And, indeed, she was a woman to hold any man's eyes . . .

Tremaine drew a deep breath when the story was finished.

"The house has been searched?" he asked. "The scoundrel couldn't be hidden——"

"Oh, no," Higgins assured him; "th' p'lice went all through it—even through your rooms."

"I'm glad of that—then we can sleep in peace."

Godfrey rather wondered that Mrs. Tremaine took no part in the discussion. She stood listening apathetically, not even noticing his stare.

"When they told me they'd gone through your rooms," added Higgins, "I was kind o' surprised. I thought you was at home t' night."

"And that we stayed in our rooms during all that row?" queried Tremaine, smiling. "I suppose there was a row?"

His eyes sought Godfrey's again; then he turned back to Higgins, evidently disturbed.

"You mean we may have to prove an alibi?" he went on quickly. "Oh, we can do that. We left the house just after seven o'clock—that was the first that I knew fourteen was occupied—I could see a light through the transom. I didn't see you anywhere about."

"Oh, now I understand," cried Higgins; "that was while we was puttin' Thompson t' bed. You didn't know him, I guess, sir?"

"No—as I said, I thought fourteen was empty."

"He's only been here three days," explained the janitor, "an' he was out most o' th' time, tankin' up."

"Oh, he was that sort, was he?" and Tremaine tossed away the end of his cigarette. "He got his deserts, then, no doubt. Come, Cecily," he added, turning to his wife.

"Elevator, sir?" asked Higgins.

"No; we've been sitting all evening at the vaudeville," and they went on up the stair, leaving Godfrey staring after them.

CHAPTER V

Simmonds Snares a Bird

"WELL," said Godfrey, sinking back in his chair, "who are they, anyway?"

"Mr. an' Mrs. Tremaine—that's all I know. But they're mighty nice people—he is, anyway—I don't see much o' her—'cept when she rings fer me t' tell me they ain't enough heat."

"How long have they been here?"

"About three weeks—an' he's a gentleman. That there Thompson, now—I was leery about lettin' him have th' rooms in th' first place—I didn't like his looks. But he offered t' pay in advance. I was goin' t' give him notice in th' mornin'. Th' agent won't stand fer no sech goin's-on."

"Was he in the habit of getting drunk?"

"Oh, he's been comfortable tanked ever since he's been here—I could smell it on him—but never so bad as t'-night. We can't have that here—our other people wouldn't stand it."

"Are all the apartments occupied?"

"No—y' see, they've been remodellin' th' house, tearin' it all apart, turnin' it inside out. It used t' be a hotel an' a damn poor one. It wasn't makin' any money, so th' guy that owns it thought he'd turn it int' an apartment house. Th' men that was a-workin' on it got three soots done, an' then around come a

walkin' delegate with a red nose an' a big black moustache, an' ordered 'em out on a strike. Them three that's done are all full, though. Thompson had one; Tremaine an' his wife's got another, an' two young sports what 're lettin' on t' study art 's got th' third —away up at th' top with a skylight."

Godfrey smoked on placidly. He suspected that Higgins had something more to tell, and he saw that the only way to get it was to wait with what patience he could. He was in no hurry; besides, he wanted time to think. He had not yet recovered from that shock of realising how he had gone wandering after a will-o'-the-wisp of his own creation. He had fancied himself as[illegible] . . .

The door opened; he heard Higgins utter a sharp cry of amazement. He looked up to see Simmonds —and with him another man, short, heavy-set, with a dark moustache. He caught the gleam of steel at his wrists.

Higgins was on his feet, staring.

"So you recognize him, do you?" asked Simmonds, his face shining with triumph. "I thought I couldn't be wrong. I got him quicker 'n I expected, Godfrey; I didn't even have to hunt for him. Of course, you know him?"

"How do you do, Mr. Godfrey?" said the prisoner [illegible] Mr. Godfrey knows me—he [illegible] up in any-[illegible]

"[illegible] returned Godfrey. "No, I didn't suppose—"

"Of course not!" said Jimmy, with scorn. "I

wouldn't put a man out—that ain't my line." And, indeed, it wasn't, for Jimmy the Dude had gained his reputation as an expert manipulator of combination locks.

The detective had listened with a satisfied smile.

"Higgins," he said, "this is the fellow who brought Thompson home, ain't it?"

"Yes, sir," responded the janitor inarticulately.

"This," observed Jimmy, with fine indignation, "is what a man gets for doing a good action. I found that cove over at Magraw's just spoilin' for trouble, and I took him in tow and brought him home. Now you say I put him out! I'd better have kept my hands off!"

"We all know you've got a kind heart, Jimmy," retorted Simmonds. "Did he have anything in his pockets besides that key?"

"What key?"

"The key to his room; of course you took that."

"Of course I did!" said Jimmy, with deep irony. "Why, of course I did! You'll find it on me."

"Oh, no, we won't," returned Simmonds, still smiling. "I've a much better opinion of you than that, Jimmy."

"Why, look here," cried Jimmy, seemingly deeply exasperated, "what 'd I want t' put him out for? Did he have any dough?"

"You probably know more about that than we do," answered Simmonds, with meaning.

"You mean I went through him? Well, I didn't! But if I did, what 'd I want t' come back and kill him for?"

"Of course," murmured Simmonds, gazing meditatively at the ceiling, "it's quite impossible that he'd drop a word about the pile he had salted down in his room."

"Oh, hell!" said Jimmy. "A bum like that! But come; let's see how far you'll go—of course you've got it figgered out! How did I work it? Mr. Higgins, here, saw me leave the building——"

"No, he didn't, Jimmy," corrected Simmonds gently. "He only saw you start for the street door. But as soon as the elevator started, you took to the stairs."

Jimmy threw up his hands with a fine gesture of despair.

"Oh, you've got it all fixed," he cried. "You'll railroad me to the chair, if you can. I suppose you've got somebody that'll swear they saw me do it?"

"Yes," agreed Simmonds quietly, "we have."

Jimmy paused to look at him and turned a little pale when he saw he was in earnest. He began to realise that perhaps he was really in a tight place.

"Come, Mr. Simmonds," he said, at last, "you don't mean that!"

"You ought to know. I'll have you identified tomorrow."

"Identified?"

"Yes—by the woman who saw you kill Thompson."

"A woman is it?" asked Jimmy helplessly. "Mebbe she's already been so obugin' as to give you my name?"

"No; but she gave us a description of you—a

mighty good one. I spotted you as soon as I heard Higgins's story."

"So Mr. Higgins had a tale to tell, too, did he?" asked the cracksman, with a somewhat venomous glance at the janitor. "Was he also on the scene? Or mebbe he was lookin' through the transom?"

"No cause to get funny, Jimmy. You won't feel that way after I get through with you."

"Oh, won't I? We all know you're a bright man, Mr. Simmonds!"

"Bright or not," said Simmonds complacently, "I've got you. Your record's against you, Jimmy."

"That's it—give a dog a bad name. See here, Mr. Godfrey, you don't believe I'd be such a damned fool as to put a man out with a woman watchin' me do it?"

"I don't know what to think," answered Godfrey slowly. "It doesn't seem quite like you, Jimmy."

"Like me! I should say not! And if I was crazy enough to do a thing like that, would I go back to Pete Magraw's and hang around there, waitin' for the police to come after me? If you think I'd do a thing like that, you'd better send me to Bellevue and be done with it!"

"I was expecting that argument, Jimmy," said Simmonds, still smiling. "You're a deep one!"

Jimmy threw up his hands again.

"Of course!" he cried. "You win; I lose! If I'd run away, it'd be a confession of guilt; if I stay, it's because I'm a deep un! Oh, it's lots of justice I'll get! Well, go ahead. Go ahead and prove it! I'll prove an alibi."

"Oh, I know you've got that all fixed, Jimmy," retorted Simmonds. "I expected that—I knew you'd think of that, right away. Who'll swear to it? Magraw?"

Jimmy's face was growing flushed, his temper was getting the better of him, which, perhaps, was just what Simmonds wanted.

"Magraw got a share of that last deal, didn't he?" he continued imperturbably. "Naturally, he's grateful. But you ought to have waited a little, Jimmy—you really ought. When was it you got back?"

"Yesterday," answered Jimmy sullenly. He evidently realised the danger of losing his temper and managed to control himself.

"And after an absence of two years! Come, Jimmy," pursued Simmonds persuasively, "what did you do it for? Was it a plant?"

Jimmy relieved his feelings by some vigorous swearing.

"I didn't do it, and you know it!" he shouted. "You know it! Only you've got t' do somethin'—you've got t' make a showin' so's th' people 'll think they're gittin' somethin' fer their money when th' papers puff you. I know th' game! Oh, come," and he stopped himself abruptly. "What's th' use? Are you goin' t' lock me up?"

"I'm afraid I'll have to," said Simmonds regretfully.

"Then, for God's sake, do it. When's this identification-long-lost-orphan scene goin' t' take place?"

"To-morrow afternoon at two o'clock. Don't you feel a little nervous about it, Jimmy?"

"Not a damn bit!" retorted Jimmy. "But say—you might tell me her name—I'd like t' know who this posy is that says I did it. While she was about it, I don't see why she didn't give you my address."

"I don't think she has the honour of your acquaintance, Jimmy. You see, she doesn't move in just your circle. I warn you her word will count more with a jury than yours and Magraw's together."

"Well, who is she?" repeated Jimmy impatiently.

"She's Miss Croydon—sister-in-law of Dickie Delroy."

The prisoner's mouth fell open, his colour changed . . .

"What!" he gasped. "What!"

Then his jaws snapped shut.

"Well," inquired Simmonds, "what 've you got to say?"

"Nothin'," answered Jimmy sullenly. "Not a damn word. Lock me up, if you're goin' to."

Simmonds laughed.

"All right; I thought I could take some of the ginger out of you."

"Lock me up, will you?" repeated Jimmy fiercely. "Come, now; lock me up."

Simmonds shrugged his shoulders and turned toward the door.

Godfrey, looking at the prisoner, noted his ruffled brow and troubled eyes. Plainly, Jimmy wanted an opportunity to arrange his thoughts—but what was there in the mere mention of Miss Croydon's name that should so disturb him? What connection could there be between them?

CHAPTER VI

Light from a New Angle

IT was long past midnight when Godfrey dropped from the top of the *Record* building in the express elevator and walked over to the station of the Elevated for the trip uptown. The story was written—it would be the feature of the morning's paper, and it would be illustrated "exclusively"—but he was not wholly satisfied with it. He had accepted the explanation given by Miss Croydon, yet he felt instinctively that it did not explain—that there was much below the surface of which he had caught only the faintest glimpse and which he was utterly unable to decipher. He did not at all believe—and he took care that the readers of the *Record* should have no cause to believe—that Miss Croydon was in any way directly connected with the crime. Indeed, there was every evidence that she had, in that particular, spoken the truth.

And in the other particulars? Well, it was hard to separate the wheat from the chaff; hard to tell where truth left off and invention began. Some foundation of truth the story must have had, or it would not have been told so glibly nor appear so plausible. Indeed, in two details, it had been confirmed by other evidence—they had found the pipe with which the blow was struck and the bullet from her pistol embedded in the door.

Below it all, underlying it all, the foundation upon

which the mystery rested was Miss Croydon's motive in making such an appointment, and, above all, in keeping it. That was a thing utterly opposed to her social training, to her maidenly instinct—it was wild, foolish, questionable. She would feel this more acutely than a man could, and yet it had not been sufficient to deter her, to hold her back. What resistless motive was it that had urged her on? What was the secret contained in the papers she had hoped to get from Thompson? Godfrey caught a dim glimpse of something dark, repulsive, terrible. What was the secret? Ah, he would have known, if Goldberg had only been a moment later!

As to Jimmy the Dude, Godfrey had maintained a careful reticence, while commending Simmonds's promptness in arresting him. Simmonds, no doubt, believed him guilty; but then Simmonds lacked imagination. It might be, Godfrey thought a little savagely, that he himself possessed too much of it, but the theory which that grizzled veteran had built up so adroitly did not in the least satisfy him. It was too prosaic, too matter-of-fact; reasonable, perhaps, but not convincing. It reduced the mystery to a mere sordid crime. Godfrey wanted colour in his mysteries—and right there, he reminded himself again, was his great weakness. Yet Jimmy's manner had not been that of a guilty man; to be sure, it had changed at the last moment, at the mention of Miss Croydon's name. Why? What was this wide-stretching net of intrigue, woven in the dark, involving alike Fifth Avenue and the "Tenderloin"—the Delroy mansion, the Metropole, Mogrew's gilded saloon.

Pondering this puzzle, with an intensity that had something poignant and personal in it, he would have been carried past his station but for the guard, who knew him, and who touched him on the arm. He went mechanically down the stair and turned up toward the avenue. Still mechanically, he mounted to his rooms and opened the door. A man who had been sitting in a chair before the fire sprang up as he entered.

"Why, Jack!" cried Godfrey, waking suddenly, and he held out his hand with that fine heartiness of greeting which is sometimes seen between men. Then, as he caught the other's eyes, his face changed. "Sit down," he said gently, "till I get out of these damp togs. Then we'll have a talk."

He disappeared into the inner room, while the younger man sank back into his chair and gazed gloomily into the fire. Even strained by emotion as it was at this moment, his face was worth looking at—clear-cut, square-jawed, alert—such as one has come, of late years, to associate with the typical college-bred American. But the face was more than merely handsome—it was open, ingenuous, winning—and looking at it, one could understand without further explanation how it happened that John Tolbert Drysdale had so many friends and so few enemies.

Godfrey was back in a moment, drew up another chair, and got out tobacco and pipes—for Drysdale a glossy briar, consecrated to his service; for himself, a meerschaum of a deep and tender brown, bespeaking years of loving usage. Not until the pipes were going nicely did Godfrey speak.

"You've heard about it, then?" he asked.

"I know that something terrible has happened," said Drysdale, a little hoarsely. "I don't know what—it's beyond imagining, even—at least, beyond my poor brain. Miss Croydon told me to come to you——"

"Ah!" commented Godfrey. "Did she do that?"

"Yes—she said you could tell me all I wished to know."

"Where did you see her?"

"At Mrs. Delroy's. I came straight here from there."

"So you were at Mrs. Delroy's?" and Godfrey mused for a moment, with eyes intent on the fire. "But come, we'll never get the thing straightened out this way. Let's begin at the beginning. Tell me what happened at Mrs. Delroy's and then I'll fill out the story, if I can. Let me have every detail you can remember."

Drysdale waited a moment to be sure of his self-control.

"I called at Mrs. Delroy's about nine o'clock," he began, "and asked for Miss Croydon——"

"Wait a minute," Godfrey interrupted. "I want to ask you a question, which you mustn't be offended at. I'm asking because I'll have to know if I'm really to help you. Are you and Miss Croydon engaged to be married?"

Again a minute passed before the answer came.

"Yes," said Drysdale huskily, at last.

Godfrey silently held out his hand and gave his companion's fingers a warm pressure.

"Now go on," he said.

"I was shown into the library," continued the other,

" while the maid took up my card. The room was in darkness, save for the light of the fire. The windows, you know, look out upon the street. Instead of sitting down, I wandered toward them and in a moment saw someone standing behind the curtains. My first thought—don't laugh at me—was that it was Miss Croydon looking for me, for she knew that I was coming, and I strode to the curtains and threw them back, uttering I know not what nonsense. You can imagine how abashed I was when Mrs. Delroy wheeled around upon me with a face so white and distorted that I scarcely knew her.

" 'Oh, I beg your pardon,' I cried, seeing how I had startled her.

" For a moment she didn't seem to know me.

" 'What is it?' she asked in a hoarse whisper. 'What has happened?'

" 'My dear Mrs. Delroy, you really must pardon me,' I repeated. 'I'm awfully sorry I frightened you. I took you for your sister.'

" She stared at me a minute longer in a queer way; then her face brightened and she smiled and held out her hand.

" 'Oh, how do you do, Mr. Drysdale?' she said, but her voice was even yet a little tremulous. 'Yes, you *did* startle me. Isn't it a fearful night?'

" 'Indeed it is,' I agreed. 'I had quite a time getting here.'

" 'You came to see Grace?' she asked, with a glance over her shoulder down into the street.

" 'Yes,' I said; 'she's expecting me. I've sent up my card. I told my man not to wait,' I added, think-

ing it was for that she had looked out of the window. 'It's too bad a night to keep either man or beast outdoors. He's to come back at eleven—I dare say Grace will put up with me till then.'

"She hesitated an instant, looking at me in a way I did not understand. Just then the maid came to the door, but seeing me with Mrs. Delroy, went away again.

"'I fear she'll not be able to see you to-night, Mr. Drysdale,' she said, at last. 'She's not been feeling well since dinner. She's lying down now, and I think she's asleep.'

"'Oh, well, then,' I said, 'I won't disturb her. It's nothing serious, I hope?'

"'Not at all; merely a little indisposition. Shall I let you out?'

"There was something in the last words—a little too much eagerness, perhaps—which arrested my attention. They didn't sound quite like Mrs. Delroy, for you know, Godfrey, she's usually the sweetest, gentlest, most hospitable woman in the world—the very last person who would think of chasing a man out into a storm. I don't know why it was, but somehow the thought flashed through my head that she was deceiving me, that she wasn't telling the truth, that she wanted to get rid of me. I've got a streak of obstinacy in me that took fire in a moment.

"'Isn't there a chance that Miss Croydon may get better after a while and come down?' I asked.

"Mrs. Delroy shook her head decidedly.

"'I'm afraid not. It's a nervous headache, you see. It will last all night, probably.'

"'Is she subject to nervous headaches?' I asked, playing for time. 'I'm sorry to hear that. She doesn't in the least look it.'

"'Oh, no,' she answered quickly, 'she's not at all subject to them; but occasionally, when she's overworked herself——'

"The sentence trailed off into nothingness. I saw that she wasn't thinking of what she was saying, and when she glanced down into the street again, I began to get an inkling of the real state of affairs. I was a little ashamed of the part I was playing, but I determined to brazen it out. If Miss Croydon had gone out alone on a night like this, I had a right to know it. Why should she make a mystery of it? What was there in her errand that needed to be concealed from me?

"Mrs. Delroy was looking at me anxiously. Finally she took the bull by the horns.

"'I really must be going upstairs,' she said. 'You'll excuse me?'

"'Certainly. Is Mr. Delroy here?'

"'No; he's out of town to-day,' and she made another movement toward the door.

"I didn't see how I was going to hang on any longer without being absolutely rude; I gave it up in despair After all, I could wait outside the house. Then, suddenly, I realised that I was acting like a cad —I had no right to play the spy—but there was something back of it all—some mystery—which worried and puzzled me. But perhaps it was only my fancy—why should Mrs. Delroy deceive me? I was playing the fool—I had no right to suspect . . .

"And just then, Godfrey, as I glanced out of the window, I saw a cab dash up to the house and a woman get out of it. I knew her on the instant, and I shouldn't care to go through another such moment of doubt and suspicion and agony. For it was worse than I had thought. She had not used her sister's carriage—then, at least, she would have been in the care of a trusted coachman—she had hired a cab——"

"Yes," said Godfrey drily. "The Delroy carriage would have been too conspicuous; besides, she wanted to keep her errand a secret, even from the servants."

"Do you mean——"

"No matter; go ahead with your story, then I'll tell you mine."

Drysdale was shaking convulsively, but he managed to go on.

"As I said, I saw a cab drive up and a woman get out. She ran up the steps, the door opened, and Miss Croydon came into the room. Even in the dim light, I could see how white her face was.

"'Grace!' cried Mrs. Delroy, stepping forward at sight of her. 'Grace!'

"Miss Croydon turned to her and held out her arms.

"'Yes, I've seen him, Edith,' she said, in a voice that I shall never forget. 'I should have taken your advice. I should not have gone.'

"'You shall not go again, dear!'

"'No,' agreed the other, 'not again!'

"There was something in her tone that caught her sister's ear.

"'What is it, Grace?' she demanded fiercely. 'Tell me!'

"'It's worse than either of us thought—he's dead, Edith!'"

Drysdale paused a moment. His voice was shaking so that he could not go on. He wiped his forehead mechanically, with trembling hand.

"Godfrey," he said, at last, "I tell you my own heart stood still at those words, uttered in such a tone—there was no mistaking her meaning—and it was a moment before I could see clearly enough to discern Mrs. Delroy's look of horror as she stared up at her sister.

"'Not that!' she cried. 'Not on your hands! Oh, why did you go? Why did you go? What have you done?'

"She swayed, clutched blindly at the air, and would have fallen had not her sister caught her in her arms. That brought my senses back, and I sprang out from the shadow of the curtains.

"'Let me help you, Grace,' I said, as calmly as I could.

"She turned upon me a face dead but for the awful horror of the eyes looking out from it.

"'You!' she whispered. 'You! You here!'

"'Certainly,' I said. 'Weren't you expecting me, Grace?'

"She controlled herself by a mighty effort; I saw how much stronger she was than her sister.

"'Oh, yes,' she said, more quietly. 'I'd forgotten. You see, Edith is ill. Will you ring?'

"I rang the bell and in a moment Mrs. Delroy was carried away. Miss Croydon lingered a moment.

"'I must go, John,' she said, with something like her

old manner. 'Come to-morrow—that is, if you care to come.'

"'Care to come!' I cried, but she held me away from her.

"'Yes,' she repeated steadily, 'care to come—perhaps you won't, and I shan't blame you. Go to Mr. Godfrey, John, and ask him—tell him that I sent you—then, afterwards, if you care to come, I shall be glad—glad——'

"I thought her self-control was going to fail her, but it was only for an instant.

"'However, John,' she added more calmly, 'if you do come, it must be with the understanding that I am to be asked no questions, be worried for no explanations. You must be content with what Mr. Godfrey can tell you, for I can tell you nothing more—at least, not now. You must trust me wholly. Good-night,' and she was gone.

"Then," concluded Drysdale grimly, "I took a cab straight here, and here I am. Now, in God's name, what does it mean? What has she done?"

CHAPTER VII

A Glimpse at a Skeleton

GODFREY smoked for a moment in silence. The story he had just heard needed digestion. It shed a new light upon the problem—a light at the same time illuminating and confusing—a light, indeed, which served only to disclose new depths of mystery. So Miss Croydon's story had been true in another particular. Her sister had been cognisant of her errand; she had not approved of it; she had tried to hold her back; but the stronger nature had overridden the weaker one. The elder woman had tried to shield the younger one, had even lied for her—she had known, then, that the errand was one that could not be explained; she, with her experience of the world, had realised, perhaps more strongly than her sister, its compromising nature. What was the secret which those papers guarded?

Drysdale hitched impatiently in his chair.

"Out with it, Jim," he said. "Don't try to soften it—I can stand it, I guess. The only thing I can't stand is this suspense."

"I'm not going to soften it," Godfrey assured him, and he rapidly outlined the tragedy of the evening, while his companion listened with horrified attention. Godfrey watched him as he sat staring into the fire with haggard face.

"Don't make it blacker than it is, Jack," he said, at last. "Personally, I don't believe they've got the right man, but I'm sure of one thing—Miss Croydon had no hand in it."

"Oh, I know she didn't!" Drysdale burst out. "It isn't that. Don't you see—it isn't that! But what took her to that house? Why should she go there alone, at night, to meet a drunken brute? Answer me that, Jim Godfrey. I don't care a hang for all the rest."

Godfrey's face hardened as he turned back to the fire. That was the very question to which he himself had been striving vainly all the evening to find an answer.

"Of course, Jack," he said slowly, "I can't tell you just what her whole purpose was. I don't know the secret of the papers she hoped to get—it's a family secret—and none of our business. But one thing's certain—whatever it is, there's no cause for you to worry about it."

"And why not?"

"Why, don't you see, Jack? If Mrs. Delroy knew her sister's errand, it could have been no questionable one—no vulgar intrigue—nothing that would touch her in any degrading way—probably nothing that would touch her personally at all. One doesn't confide things of that sort to one's sister, nor ask advice about them. To be sure, she didn't heed the advice; but at the very worst, all she's been guilty of is an indiscretion. That, I think, any man would be glad to forgive."

Drysdale drew a deep breath of relief.

"Of course," he assented quickly.

"And that," continued Godfrey earnestly, "is all you need to know. I believe she tells the exact truth when she says she tried to save Thompson's life. Therefore, you may go back to her to-morrow without the need of asking a single question. Depend upon it, she'll explain it all in time. Show her now that you trust her—that's the least you can do—yes, and the most you can do to help her."

"I will," agreed Drysdale instantly. "You've taken a great load off my heart, old man."

"You hadn't faith enough. Why, one needs only to look at her to see that she's above suspicion. I don't think you quite appreciate her. Most men would be glad to get a woman like that on any terms."

Drysdale sat for a moment staring into the fire.

"I do appreciate her," he said slowly, "through and through. I'm appalled at the wonder of it, sometimes, that she should really care for a fellow like me. I'm not worthy——"

Godfrey was walking nervously about the room.

"No, you're not," he broke in abruptly. "Mighty few men would be. Luckily, women don't stop to look at that side of it. Besides, she'll help you, if you really try to live up to her——"

"I intend to," said Drysdale humbly.

Godfrey started to say something more, then shook himself impatiently.

"Her appearance will help her," he added in another tone, "when she's called before the coroner—she'll impress the jury in just the right way."

Drysdale got up quickly.

"She'll have to appear before the coroner?"

"Of course—she's practically the only witness. Your place is with her—more especially since you say Delroy himself is out of town."

"Thank you," and Drysdale took up his hat. "You've helped me a lot," and with another warm hand-clasp, he was gone.

Godfrey turned back into the room and sat down again before the fire. Drysdale's story had, indeed, furnished him with new food for thought. So it was a family secret that Grace Croydon was guarding. She had spoken the truth—she had scorned to lie. A secret that affected the family honour. That was conceivable—it furnished the only possible solution of the mystery. He felt that he could reconstruct the drama with some degree of plausibility. He smiled grimly as he drew a pad of paper toward him and got out his pencil. Like all good tragedies, it should be in five acts.

Act I.

The Croydon family possesses a skeleton, and one Thompson holds the key to the closet in the shape of certain papers. He threatens to use them, to display the skeleton to the world. He writes to Miss Croydon, or perhaps to Mrs. Delroy, demanding a price for his papers. Mrs. Delroy is for letting him do his worst; Miss Croydon, less sensible (also perhaps more sensitive), is for trying to buy him off. She overrides her sister, makes an appointment with Thompson, disre-

garding the risk she runs of compromising herself. (The skeleton, then, must be a particularly grisly one!)

Act II.

Miss Croydon goes to the appointment alone, but with the precaution of taking a pistol with her. (Query—Was she accustomed to using a pistol?) She is admitted by Thompson, who has barely awakened from a drunken sleep. A ten-minute parley follows, during which he states his demands. She, perhaps, finds them excessive, impossible to comply with, and tells him so. He grows angry, abusive, perhaps attempts some violence. She produces her pistol, and at that moment a man steals behind him from the inner room and strikes him down. Then, standing over him, he deliberately shoots him through the heart. Miss Croydon, perceiving his intention, instinctively raises her own pistol and fires at him. The shots are simultaneous, which explains the single loud report heard by the janitor. The murderer calmly opens the door and escapes.

Act III.

Mrs. Delroy is at her library window, anxiously awaiting her sister's return. She has been absent much longer than she expected to be, and Mrs. Delroy is growing alarmed. Enter Jack Drysdale, the sister's affianced. Mrs. Delroy tries desperately to get rid of him, even lies to do so, in the effort to pre-

vent the discovery of her sister's absence. As he is about to go, Miss Croydon returns, sees her sister, and tells her that the interview has led to Thompson's death. Mrs. Delroy jumps to the conclusion that her sister has herself committed the crime and collapses. Miss Croydon then, for the first time, seeing Drysdale, warns him that she is compromised. Exit. Drysdale rushes off in search of an explanation. (That Mrs. Delroy should for an instant believe her sister guilty of such a crime argues that the skeleton is so horridly repulsive that only Thompson's death could bury it effectually—which, of course, is plausible, since he doubtless knew the contents of the papers.)

"There," said Godfrey, laying down his pencil, "after the recognised fashion, three acts are devoted to deepening the complications; two must now be devoted to clearing them away. That's the work for the future. Let us see what we have to do."

He took up the pencil again and turned to a new sheet.

1.—To establish the identity of the murdered man. This may be done by a more careful examination of his belongings. The callosities on his hands, his weather-beaten face, the cut of his clothes all indicate that he was a sailor. I should say that he had seen better days, but had been brought down in the world by drink. (Note.—In the morning, send a man along the water-front with his photograph.)

2.—To disinter the skeleton. This, of course, will render necessary an examination of the history of the

Croydons, and should not be difficult. (Note—Ask Delaney to look up the family.)

3.—To discover the murderer.

"This last," continued Godfrey, gazing contemplatively at his paper, "is, of course, the most important; indeed, it is the object of the other two. Now, let us see what we know about this mysterious individual," and he turned another page.

1.—He must have been in apartment fourteen before Miss Croydon's arrival, otherwise he could not have gained access to the bedroom unseen. (This shuts out Jimmy the Dude.)

2.—Therefore he was a friend or at least an acquaintance of Thompson's, since it is impossible that he could have been there without Thompson's knowledge.

3.—But if Thompson consented to his overhearing the interview, he must have expected some help from him.

4.—Yet he was not in the apartment at seven o'clock when Higgins put Thompson to bed.

5.—But Higgins says that no one entered after that except Miss Croydon. (Higgins may, of course, be mistaken.)

6.—Something which occurs during the interview arouses the unknown's anger. He picks up a piece of pipe (we must discover where he got it) and steals out upon Thompson and knocks him down. If it was merely to protect Miss Croydon, that would have sufficed, but instead he coolly draws a pistol and kills

his victim. Then, knowing that the noise would attract the janitor, he steps into the hall, hides somewhere, and, as Higgins rushes into the room, walks down the stair and escapes.

7.—We have Miss Croydon's description of him.

Godfrey looked at his notes musingly.

"It's a tangled web," he said, at last. "A tangled web—there's lots of threads that need straightening out. But, except for that first point, it's not to be denied that Jimmy the Dude fits in with all the particulars. He was an acquaintance of Thompson, perhaps a friend; if he stole the key, he could have entered the rooms at any time; he's certainly capable of killing a man, upon provocation. But the mystery is—what could the provocation have been? To protect Miss Croydon? But then, why kill Thompson? That shooting of an unconscious man argues a ferocity scarcely human. Robbery? But Jimmy nor any other sane person would deliberately murder a man under the eyes of a witness. Well, to-morrow will tell the story—to-day, rather. If Miss Croydon identifies him, that settles it—but I've a feeling that it will be a long time before I can fill in the rest of the drama. However, I'll keep these notes."

He was whistling softly to himself as he tore the sheets from the pad. Somehow, the case no longer harried and perplexed him as it had from the moment he recognised Miss Croydon, cowering against the wall in suite fourteen; a curious load was lifted from him; she was not guilty, she had committed at most only an indiscretion; she was free from stain. The

thought pleased him, elated him. He would lead the pack far away from her—the papers, the suspicious public. She should emerge unsmirched, even in the least degree.

He folded the sheets and docketed them:

THE MARATHON MYSTERY,

A TRAGEDY IN FIVE ACTS.

Then he placed them carefully in a file case. They were to confront him, before long, as an evidence of his own insufficiency—so far from having witnessed three acts of the tragedy, it was merely the prologue which had been enacted before him.

CHAPTER VIII

The Fog Thickens

THE coroner's court was crowded, as it always is at any hearing presenting features of morbid or sensational interest, and Goldberg, with an inborn love of the theatric, arranged his witnesses so as to lead gradually to the climax, the dénouement. He put the janitor on the stand first, and then had Simmonds tell his story. Some medical testimony followed as to the exact nature of Thompson's injuries, and the bullet, which had been extracted, was put in evidence—it was plainly much too large to have come from Miss Croydon's pistol. Finally, Miss Croydon herself was called. A little gasp of delicious excitement ran through the crowd as she appeared at the door of the witness room. Here was a titbit to touch the palates of even the jaded police reporters.

Godfr , looking at her as she came steadily forward to the stand, felt his heart warm with admiration. She seemed perfectly composed, and if not perfectly at ease, at least as nearly so as any woman of her position could be in such a place. Godfrey was pleased to se Drysdale in close attendance, and he nodded to him encouragingly.

Miss Croydon told her story clearly and with an accent of sincerity there was no doubting. It differed in one detail from the story she had told the night before. Thompson, she said, had perceived the intruder

and there had been a short, fierce struggle before he fell under the blow of the pipe. He was not unconscious but was struggling to his feet again, when his assailant shot him.

Jury, coroner, reporters listened with close attention. Godfrey watched her with a grim little smile at her superb assurance, her perfect poise. Then he glanced at the jury and smiled again as he noted their seriously respectful faces. When she had finished, Goldberg began a brief examination.

"That is not precisely the story you told last night, Miss Croydon," he suggested.

"No," she said; "no—I was too startled, then, too over-wrought to think quite clearly. This morning I endeavoured to recall exactly what occurred."

"And you believe that you have succeeded?"

"Yes, sir; I am sure of it."

"You would say, then, I suppose, that the deceased had been killed in self-defence."

"I am not familiar with the niceties of the law, sir," she answered steadily.

"But there was a struggle?"

"Yes, sir."

"And the deceased was endeavouring to inflict some injury upon his adversary?"

"He was doing his best to do so, I should say, sir."

The coroner paused for a moment and glanced at the jury, but none of them seemed disposed to ask any questions. Then Goldberg made a sign to Simmonds. He left the room, but reappeared in a moment, leading in Jimmy the Dude.

Not until they were quite near did Miss Croydon

perceive them; then, as her eyes met the prisoner's, she half started from her chair, her face like marble. As for Jimmy, Godfrey was astonished to perceive the fascinated gaze he bent upon Miss Croydon. What was the connection between them? Where could they possibly have met? Was Jimmy guilty, after all? Certainly Simmonds had no longer any doubt of it, to judge by his beatific expression of countenance.

It was over in an instant—Miss Croydon gripped back her self-control and the prisoner managed to remove his eyes from her; but Goldberg had perceived their agitation, and the gaze he bent upon the witness grew perceptibly more stern.

"Miss Croydon," he began, "you have described the guilty man as short and heavy-set with a dark moustache turning up at the ends. Look at the prisoner before you—is he the man?"

"He is not," replied the witness in a firm voice and without an instant's hesitation.

Jimmy was again watching her with expressive eyes.

"You are sure?"

"Perfectly sure; there is little or no resemblance."

"You do not know the prisoner?"

"No, sir; I have never before seen him."

"He was talking with the janitor last night when you entered the Marathon."

"I had on a heavy veil at the time and could not see distinctly."

The answers came promptly, calmly. Goldberg hesitated and glanced at Simmonds's crestfallen face. Was he justified in pushing her further? He glanced

at her again from under half-closed lashes, and her imperious beauty did its work.

"That is all," he said abruptly. "You may go, Miss Croydon."

Godfrey watched her as she lowered her veil, rose, stepped down, and took Drysdale's arm. She had carried it off well, exceedingly well. Her attitude had been so frank, so candid, so openly sincere that he himself was almost convinced by it. But for that instant's agitation when she first perceived the prisoner, he would have been quite convinced. She had told her story and answered Goldberg's questions with clear cheek and steady eye—with a directness which had plainly carried great weight with the jury. Wonderful was the adjective which Godfrey used in describing her to himself.

But what had that instant's agitation meant? Was Jimmy really guilty? Was she trying to shield him, out of gratitude, perhaps, for defending her? Had Jimmy risen to that height of chivalry? See with what a fascinated gaze he was watching her now!

She passed from sight, the door closed, and he leaned back in his chair to hear Jimmy tell a smooth story of his doings the night before. Magraw and half a dozen others confirmed the tale; it was a really good alibi, carefully arranged; there was nothing to disprove it, and at the end, the jury, without retiring, handed in the usual verdict of death at the hands of a person unknown.

When it was over, Simmonds crooked at Godfrey an inviting finger, and together they went down to the detective's private office.

"Sit down," said Simmonds; "I want to talk to you. We're up against a tough proposition."

Godfrey sat down and looked at him.

"Yes, we are," he agreed.

"What do you think of it?"

"I'm more inclined to think Jimmy guilty than I was last night."

"You saw, then, that she was trying to protect him?" asked Simmonds eagerly.

"I saw there was some understanding between them. Don't let your theory of Jimmy's guilt carry you away. Besides, there's a good deal to say on the other side. There wasn't enough finish about it to look like Jimmy. He'd think a long time before he killed a man with a third person looking on."

"But if it was self-defence?"

Godfrey raised his eyebrows expressively.

"I think she was drawing the long bow myself," agreed Simmonds, quickly; "and there can be only one reason for it—she's trying to protect Jimmy, or whoever it was killed Thompson. It was Jimmy, I tell you—he was jealous of her—"

"Oh, nonsense!" interrupted Godfrey impatiently. "A love affair between those two! You've been reading French romances, Simmonds!"

"Maybe I have; but I've run across stranger things than that right here in New York. This is a bad snarl, any way you look at it. Here's a point, now: how could Thompson, who was dead drunk at seven o'clock, be wide awake at eight? How could he have heard Miss Croydon's knock?"

"Maybe it wasn't Thompson who opened the door."

"But Miss Croydon entered without hesitation. The man who opened the door must 've been the one she expected to see. You'll remember, she asked for Thompson."

"Well, whoever it was," Godfrey pointed out, "it wasn't Jimmy. He couldn't have beaten the elevator upstairs."

"No," admitted Simmonds helplessly, "he couldn't. But let me point out one thing—whoever got into Thompson's rooms had his key. There was nobody there when Higgins put Thompson to bed; Higgins locked the door when he came out; Thompson's windows were all locked on the inside and the transom was bolted. Now if Jimmy didn't have the key, who did?"

"I don't know," said Godfrey. "But we'll never arrive anywhere if we keep tangling ourselves up this way. Who is Thompson? The first thing we've got to do is to establish his identity. Then, maybe, we can make a guess at the rest of the story."

"Of course; I saw that at once. But a queer thing is that we can't find out a thing about Thompson. Last night was the first time he'd ever been seen at Magraw's—nobody there 'd ever seen him before. He spent three or four dollars treating the crowd. Then he got noisy and Magraw was going to call the police, but Jimmy spoke up and said he'd look after him. His story was straight that far."

"Have you gone through Thompson's belongings?"

"Here they are," and Simmonds brought out a canvas bag and opened it. "Look at them."

Godfrey turned out the contents and examined them piece by piece. It was merely a lot of ordinary cloth-

ing, most of it much the worse for wear and all of it strongly impregnated with the odour of tobacco.

"Anything in the pockets?" asked Godfrey.

"Not a thing except some loose smoking tobacco. There's one thing about the clothing, though—have you noticed? It's all summer clothing; see these linen trousers, now."

Godfrey nodded, with drawn brows.

"What's this?" he asked suddenly, holding up a swart object, shaped like a clam-shell and halving in the same way along the sharp edge.

"I don't know. A curio picked up at sea somewheres, perhaps. I have a theory that Thompson was a sailor."

"Why?"

"Well, the bag, in the first place—only a sailor would carry his clothes that way. Then, put your head down in it and, under the tobacco, you'll smell the salt."

Godfrey sniffed and nodded again. Then he got out his knife.

"Let's take a look at the inside of Mr. Thompson's curio," he said, and inserted the blade.

A twist and the sides unclosed. Simmonds sprang back with a sharp cry of surprise as he saw what lay within, and even Godfrey's heart gave a sudden leap.

For there, coiled thrice upon itself, lay a little viper, with venomous, triangular head.

Then, in an instant, Godfrey smiled.

"It's not alive," he said. "Don't you see, it's some marvellous kind of nut."

Simmonds approached cautiously and took another look.

"A nut?" he repeated. "A nut? Well, that beats me!"

And well it might, for in every detail the form was perfect. Godfrey looked at it musingly.

"This may give us a clew," he said. "I shouldn't imagine a nut like this grows in many parts of the world. Though, of course, a sailor might pick it up anywhere—from another sailor, in a slop-shop, even here in New York, perhaps."

He closed the shell together again and placed it in the bag, stuffing the rest of the clothing in after it.

"Thompson had no very exalted idea of cleanliness," he remarked. "His clothing needs a visit to the laundry. Anything else?"

"Yes—he'd rented his furniture from a store down the street. He had to pay his rent in advance because he had so little baggage. That receipt's the only thing that's got his name on it—oh, yes; there's a letter tattooed on his left arm, but it's not a T—it's a J."

"Which goes to show that his name wasn't Thompson. I think you're right, Simmonds, in putting him down as a sailor. I thought so last night—in fact, I've already got two men making a tour of the docks trying to find somebody who knew him."

"Have you?" said Simmonds, smiling. "That's like you. There's another curious thing, though, about the clothing he had on."

"What is that?"

"Some of it's marked with one initial, some with another. Not one piece is marked with his."

"That *is* queer," commented Godfrey; "but it isn't half so queer as another thing. Why should a sailor, a drunkard, without a decent suit of clothes, rent an apartment that costs him forty dollars a month, when he could get a room for a dollar a week down on the Bowery, his natural stamping ground?"

Simmonds nodded helplessly.

"That's so," he said.

"Unless," added Godfrey, "he thought he had to have some such place to work from. He could hardly have asked Miss Croydon to meet him in a Bowery lodging house."

"No," agreed Simmonds; "but he needn't have blown in forty dollars, either. He could 'a' got a nice room 'most anywhere uptown for five a week——"

A tap at the door interrupted him.

"Come in," he called.

The door opened and the coroner's clerk entered.

"Mr. Goldberg sends the exhibits back to you," he said, holding out a parcel to Simmonds.

Simmonds opened it and took out a pocket book, a pipe, a knife, and some silver money.

"All right," he said, and signed a receipt.

Godfrey waited until the door closed, then he rose and came over to Simmonds's side.

"There's something here that might help us," he said, picking up the pocket book. "Those clippings—why, they're not here!"

Simmonds looked dully.

"That's another thing I wanted to tell you. The clippings have been removed."

"Removed? By whom?"

"That's a question. They were removed some time between the moment we looked at them and the moment the coroner took charge."

Godfrey stared at him with startled eyes.

"You remember," Simmonds continued, "that after we looked at the pocket-book, I put it back in Thompson's pocket."

"Yes—I saw you do that."

"We then went into the bedroom, and had a look around, leaving the body alone——"

"With Miss Croydon," said Godfrey, completing the sentence.

"Precisely. Goldberg arrived a minute or two later. Then he and I searched the body again. When he opened the pocket-book there was nothing in it except the rent receipt."

Godfrey sat down again in his chair. The inference was obvious, irresistible. The clippings had been removed by Miss Croydon—they were the papers she had risked so much to get possession of. Simmonds and he had had the secret under their hands and had missed it! It was not a pleasant reflection.

His thoughts flew back to Miss Croydon, and he found himself again admiring her. To have taken the clippings demanded a degree of bravery, of self-control, amounting almost to callousness. It seemed incredible that she should have dared approach the body, open the coat . . .

Then he remembered her half-fainting attitude when

he had returned from the inner room. At the time, he had thought the collapse natural enough. Now, it took on a new meaning.

"There's another thing," continued Simmonds, after a moment. "Here's the piece of pipe we found on the floor. Do you know where it came from?"

"No—I was going to look that up."

"It came from the radiator. The connections were defective and a plumber was replacing them. This is a piece of pipe he had removed and left lying behind the radiator. He remembers it distinctly. Do you recall the position of the radiator?"

"Yes; it's against the wall opposite the bedroom door."

"Exactly. Then the person coming from that door must have crossed the room to get it. More than that, he must have hunted for it or known it was there, because it was in the shadow behind the radiator. It couldn't be seen unless one looked for it—I've tried it."

Godfrey paused to consider.

"Did you give these points to Goldberg?" he asked.

"No; I didn't think it would help matters any; besides, I didn't want to put Miss Croydon on her guard."

"Of course—though all this doesn't actually implicate her."

"No; but it shows she knows more than she's told us," said Simmonds doggedly. "I don't think she's been square with us."

Godfrey did not permit any trace of his inward perturbation to appear on his countenance; nevertheless

he was seriously disturbed. He had hoped that no one but himself would suspect Miss Croydon's lack of frankness. He felt a certain irritation against her —she should have been more careful; she should have foreseen that the clippings would be traced to her. She was relying too much on his forbearance. He must do his best to control Simmonds.

"Well, perhaps she hasn't," he said slowly, after a moment; "but maybe she's not so much to blame for that, after all. Anyway, we've got to work at the case from the other end. We've got to identify Thompson first."

"Yes," agreed Simmonds; "that's our best hold. You'll let me know if you find out anything?"

"Of course," said Godfrey, rising, and with a curt nod he went out and down the steps to the street.

At the office he found two reports awaiting him. One was from the men he had sent along the docks—they had found no one who could identify the photograph of Thompson. The other was from Delaney, the head of the *Record's* intelligence department. At two o'clock that morning, just before retiring, Godfrey had 'phoned a message to the office:

"Delaney—I want all the information obtainable concerning the history of the Croydon family, to which Mrs. Richard Delroy and Grace Croydon belong."

This was the result:

"Gustave Croydon, notary and money-lender, No. 17 Rue d'Antin, Paris, removed with wife and young

daughter about 1878, to Beckenham, just south of London, England. Why he removed from France not known. Rue d'Antin has been completely rebuilt within last thirty years and only person there now who remembers Croydon is an old notary named Fabre, who has an office at the corner of Rue St. Augustin. He has vague memory that Croydon left France to avoid criminal prosecution of some sort.

"Croydon bought small country place near Beckenham and lived there quietly in semi-retirement. Fortune apparently not large. In 1891, mortgaged estate for £2000; mortgage paid in 1897. Religion, Catholic. Excellent reputation at Beckenham.

"Eldest daughter, Edith, born in France, August 26, 1874. Educated at school there, but broke down from over-study and returned to Beckenham, where she became interested in social settlement work. There met Richard Delroy, New York, who was making investigation of London charities. Married him June 6, 1900, and went immediately to New York.

"Only other child, younger daughter Grace, born at Beckenham, May 12, 1880. Educated at home. No unusual incidents in life, so far as known.

"Croydon and wife died typhoid fever, 1901. Delroys came to England, and, after selling property and settling estate, took Grace home with them. Estate, left wholly to younger sister, paid inheritance tax on £7500."

Godfrey read this through slowly, dwelling upon it point by point.

"The skeleton," he said to himself, "is pretty plain

—it lies concealed somewhere behind Croydon's departure from France. There must have been some unusual reason for that—a reason even more serious, perhaps, than this threatened prosecution—the clippings would tell the story.

"But is it worth while trying to dig it up? It wouldn't be a difficult thing to do if the newspapers handled it at the time; but I don't know," and he stared out through his window with drawn brows. "If it's buried again, I believe I'll let it rest—for the present, anyway," and he whirled back to his desk.

He wrote the story of the day's developments and turned it in.

"We've been lucky," said the city editor, with a gleeful smile, as he took the copy. "We've got photographs of all the principals."

"Have we?"

"Yes—they cost $500, but they're worth it. No other paper in town will have 'em."

"That's good," said Godfrey, but it was a half-hearted commendation, and he left the office in a frame of mind not wholly amiable. The methods of a popular newspaper are not always above reproach.

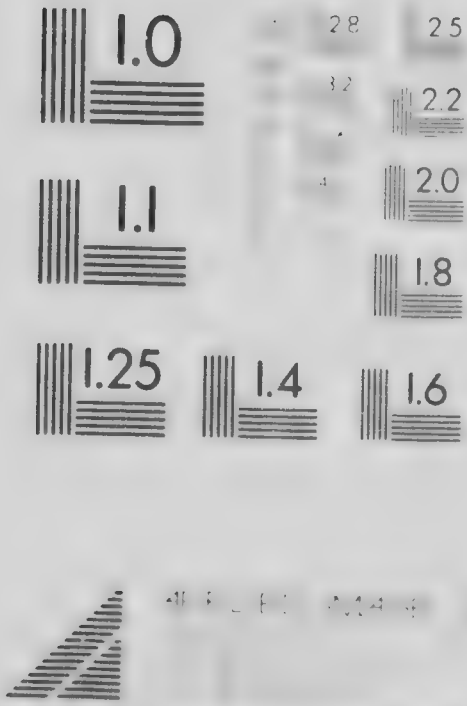
"Thank Heaven," he added to himself, his face clearing a little, "there's nothing in my story to implicate either Miss Croydon or Mrs. Delroy—there's no hint of the skeleton! I took care of that—which," he concluded, with a grim smile, "is mighty forbearing in a yellow journalist!"

What further tests there were to be of his forbearance not even he suspected!

PART II

CECILY

MICROCOPY RESOLUTION TEST CHART



CHAPTER I

A Change of Lodgings

AS a matter of course, the affair at the Marathon created a great public sensation. The papers overflowed with details, theories, suggestions to the police, letters from interested readers. Many of the latter were quite certain that they could quickly solve the mystery, but unfortunately private business demanded their whole attention; meanwhile, the stupidity of the detective force was a disgrace to the city; let the guilty parties be arrested without further delay, whatever their position! It was remarkable how few accepted the simple theory which Simmonds had propounded; all of them chose to discern something deeper, more intricate, more mysterious, and Miss Croydon incurred much oblique reference. This, for the most part, took the form of scathing, even hysterical polemics against the degeneration of American Society, the greatest peril threatening the health and prosperity of the Republic. As it was with Rome, so would it be with America; luxury, sensuality, a moral code growing ever more lax, could have only one result!

No doubt these vigorous correspondents enjoyed themselves and imagined that Society quivered in consternation under the castigation. Certainly they formed a source of exquisite amusement to the readers of the papers.

It has long been a habit of mine, when any particularly abstruse criminal mystery is before the public, to pin my faith to the *Record*. Its other features I do not admire, but I knew that Jim Godfrey was it expert in crime, and ever since my encounter with him in the Holladay case, I have entertained the liveliest admiration of his acumen and audacity. If a mystery was possible of solution, I believed that he would solve it, so it was to the *Record* I turned now, and read carefully every word he wrote about the tragedy.

It is difficult for me to explain, even to myself, the interest with which I followed the case. I suppose most of us have a fondness, more or less unrealised, for the unique and mysterious, and we all of us revolt sometimes against the commonplaceness of every-day existence. We had been having a protracted siege of unusually hard work at the office, and I was a little run down in consequence; I felt that I needed a tonic, a distraction, and I found it in "The Tragedy in Suite Fourteen," as Godfrey had christened it.

I was sitting in my room on the evening of the second day after the affair, smoking a post-prandial pipe and reading the *Record's* stenographic report of the coroner's inquest, when there came a knock at my door and my landlady entered. She held in her hand a paper which had a formidable legal appearance.

"Have you found another apartment yet, Mr. Lester?" she asked.

"No, I haven't, Mrs. Fitch," I said. "I'm afraid I've not been as diligent in looking for one as I should have been."

"Well, I've just got another notice," and she sighed

wearily. "They're going to begin tearing down the house day after to-morrow. I can't find another house, so I'm going to put my furniture in storage. I've told the men to come for it to-morrow."

"All right," I said. "If I can't find an apartment to suit, I'll put my stuff in storage, too, and stay at a hotel for a while. I'll know by to-morrow noon, Mrs. Fitch."

"Very well. It does seem hard, though," she added, pausing on the threshold, "that we should be the ones to suffer, when there's so many other blocks they might have taken."

"The residents of any of the other blocks would probably have said the same thing," I pointed out. "After all, I suppose this block was better than the others, or it wouldn't have been chosen."

She sniffed sceptically, and went on her way to notify her other lodgers of the imminent eviction.

We were martyrs to the march of public improvement. The block had been condemned by the usual legal process, and an armory was to be erected on the site. So there was nothing left for us to do but move. I had hoped that Mrs. Fitch would find another house somewhere in the neighbourhood and that I could stay with her; now, it seemed, I must search for other quarters, and at exceedingly short notice. To find comfortable ones, conveniently situated, and at the same time within reach of my modest income would, I knew, be a problem not easy of solution.

I settled back in my chair and took up my paper again, when a sudden thought brought me bolt upright. Here was an apartment, two rooms and bath, just what

I wanted, empty—and moreover, so situated that I should be admirably placed for close-at-hand study of the tragedy. I glanced at my watch—it was only half-past seven—and I hurried into my coat in a sudden fever of impatience lest someone else should get there before me.

Twenty minutes' walk brought me to the Marathon apartment house, and as I stepped into the vestibule, I saw sitting by the elevator a red-faced man whom I recognised instantly as Higgins, the janitor. He rose as I approached him.

"You have an apartment here to rent, haven't you?" I asked.

"Not jest now, sir," he answered. "There will be next week—if th' walkin' delegates leaves us alone. You see, th' house is bein' remodelled."

"Oh," I said, more disappointed than I cared to show, "I thought perhaps there was one I could move into at once. Next week won't do me any good."

He moistened his lips and scratched his head, eyeing me undecidedly.

"May I ask your name, sir?" he said, at last.

I handed him a card, which had also the address of my firm, Graham & Royce. He read it slowly.

"We've got one apartment, sir," he said, looking up when he had mastered it; "two rooms an' bath—but it needs a little cleanin' up. When do y' have t' have it?"

"I have to move in to-morrow," I answered, and I told him briefly why. "May I look at this apartment?"

He hesitated yet a moment, then straightened up with sudden resolution.

"You kin see it if you want to, sir," he said; "but first, I must tell you that it's soot fourteen, where they was a—a murder two days ago."

"A murder?" I repeated. "Oh, yes; I *did* see something about it in the papers. Well, that doesn't make any difference; I'm not afraid of ghosts."

"Then that's all right, sir," he said, with a sigh of relief, and motioned toward the elevator. "I didn't believe we'd find it so easy t' rent that soot ag'in," he added, as we started upward, "though I see now that I was foolish; fer really, it don't make no difference——"

The car stopped and he led the way down the hall without troubling to finish the sentence.

"Here we are," he added, pausing before a door and producing a bunch of keys. "Which reminds me that I'll have t' git a key fer you—the other tenant lost his—leastways, it wasn't found on him. Or mebbe you'd rather I'd change th' lock?"

"Oh, no," I assured him. "Another key will do," and we entered together.

I examined the room with keen interest. Evidently everything had been left just as it was on the night of the crime; only the body had been removed, and it, I knew, was at the morgue, waiting identification. Higgins was busy pointing out to me the advantages of the apartment, but I confess I did not hear him. I reconstructed the picture which had met Godfrey's eye when he burst into the room; I tried in vain to discern some point of evidence which he had

overlooked. The furniture was of the commonest kind and consisted of only the most necessary articles.

Higgins led the way into the bedroom and opened the door of the bathroom beyond.

"I shall bring my own furniture," I said. "But I haven't any carpets. Perhaps I can buy these. They seem pretty good."

"They are, sir," agreed Higgins. "They're good carpets and as good as th' day they was put down. It 'll make it lots easier for us if we don't have t' take 'em up."

"All right," I agreed. "Find out what they're worth. When can you have the rooms ready?"

He looked at me and scratched his head again; then, remembering suddenly the nature of janitors, I took out my purse and tipped him.

"Have them ready by to-morrow afternoon," I said. "Get a man to help you, if necessary. I'll expect to be at home here to-morrow night."

His face cleared instantly.

"I'll do it, sir," he agreed, as he pocketed the money. "I'll see that everything gits in all right. You kin sign th' rent agreement to-morrow—th' soot rents fer forty a month."

"Very well," I said, and followed him into the outer room, smiling to myself at the thought that I had forgotten to ask for this important detail. "Would you mind if I sat down and took a smoke, while I decide how I'll arrange my furniture?"

"That's all right, sir," he assured me instantly; and just then the elevator bell rang. "There," he

added, "it's them confounded artists, too lazy t' walk downstairs. I'll be back in a minute, sir."

It took me but an instant to light my cigar, then I whirled my chair around to the table before which it stood. The table had a single drawer. I opened it. It was absolutely empty. I went quickly to the bedroom and opened the closet, but not even a piece of clothing hung there. Then I turned to the dresser, but its three drawers, too, were empty. Evidently all of Thompson's belongings had been removed by the police. Of course they had searched through every nook and cranny; it was foolish of me to expect to find anything now.

I returned to my chair and looked again about the room. There was the corner where Miss Croydon had cowered, and from which she had shot at Thompson's assailant; there was the spot where Thompson himself had fallen; he had lain extended on the carpet, while the . . . what was that? A tiny sparkle caught my eye, a reflection of the light overhead. I sprang from my chair and stooped above the place, but could see nothing. I returned to my chair, and again caught the reflection. This time, I marked it exactly in the pattern of the carpet, went to it carefully; put down my hand—nothing—yes, a little hard point pressed into the carpet, so minute I could not pick it up. I moistened my finger, and an instant later, under the light, I saw that I had found a diamond!

I wrapped it carefully in a scrap of paper and stowed it away safely in my pocket-book. Then I went back to my chair. How came the diamond there? A stone so minute must have been set in a piece of

jewelry; perhaps was only one of many such stones forming a cluster, or a border to a larger jewel. If one could only discover the piece from which it had fallen, there would be a cl . . . .

"Well, have y' got it all fixed, sir?" asked a voi from the door, and I turned with a start to see Hig gins standing there.

"Yes," I answered, rousing myself with an effort: and I gave him such directions as occurred to me. "Has anyone else been in the rooms?" I asked.

"Not since yesterday mornin', sir, when th' coroner brought his jury t' look 'em over. They've been locked since then."

"I thought perhaps somebody might have wanted to rent them," I explained.

"Say, that's funny!" he cried. "I'd purty nigh fergot it. Early this mornin' they was somebody a woman." He came close to me and dropped his voice to a hoarse whisper. "D' y' know who I think it was? That Croydon woman!"

I stared at him in amazement.

"Weren't you sure?"

"No; she had a veil wrapped around her head an' she was dressed different. But it was her—I know it."

"And what did she want?" I asked, more and more astonished.

"She wanted t' see th' rooms; but I told her they was closed. I tell you, I was dead afeard t' come up here with her. How'd I know but she'd take a shot at me? Then she wanted t' rent 'em sight unseen, an' offered a month's rent in advance—but I told her

we didn't rent soots t' single women, which is true. Mebbe I was kind o' rough, but I was a-skeered t' have her around, fer I kind o' believe she's crazy, so purty soon, after some more talkin', she give it up an' went away."

As we went down in the elevator, I pondered this remarkable story. Could it really have been Miss Croydon? But what possible reason could she have for wishing to rent the rooms? How could she nerve herself to enter them again? Was it the rooms and not the man that had brought her to the Marathon? Did they hold the key to the mystery? Did they contain some secret . . .

The car stopped. A man and woman were waiting to be taken up. At the man I did not even glance, for his companion held my eyes. Such fierce, dark, passionate beauty I had never seen before, and my nerves were still tingling with the sight of it as I left the building and turned westward toward my rooms.

CHAPTER II

A Cry for Help

FOR three days Thompson's body lay enthroned on its couch at the morgue, but of the thousands of people who filed past it, not one could give a single clew to its identity. Godfrey's emissaries went from end to end of the docks, loitered in sailors' saloons and eating-places, provided innumerable drinks, but nowhere did they met anyone who recognized the rough, bearded face which the camera had reproduced. The officers of every ship that had arrived within a week were interviewed, but none of them knew Thompson. It would seem that he had dropped from the clouds and that no one had witnessed his descent. It was an altogether puzzling state of affairs, and made impossible any further real progress in the investigation of the crime.

The police worked in a desultory fashion along the usual lines. Various theories were built up and exploded; various clews were laboriously followed and found to lead nowhere; various suspects were arrested and afterward released; a close and utterly futile watch was kept on the movements of Jimmy the Dude. It was plainly apparent that the authorities were all at sea, and it seemed altogether likely that the affair would soon be written down with New York's other unsolved mysteries.

Public interest waned and dwindled, and passed on to other things. Even with me, living at the very scene of the crime, it faded in an astonishing way; it no longer occupied my thoughts; over my evening pipe, it was not the details of the mystery I conjured up, but a vision of a dark face . . .

An inquiry of the janitor developed the fact that it was my neighbours, Mr. and Mrs. Tremaine, whom I had met that evening as I left the elevator. They had the apartment just across the hall from mine, and I had thought, of course, that I must meet them frequently; but three days had passed and I had caught not a glimpse of them; their hours for coming and going seemed radically different from mine.

So it was with a sense of disappointment somewhat foolishly excessive that I sat in my room and watched the smoke circle up around the chandelier and wondered at the whim which had brought me to this apartment. Not but that it was comfortable enough; yet I was vaguely restless, uneasy; I had not that homelike sense of comfort and quiet which had marked my sojourn with Mrs. Fitch. There was nothing to be discovered here concerning the tragedy; the rooms had been stripped bare of evidence before my arrival; it was absurd to suppose . . .

I heard the sudden opening of a door; a scream, a call, full of terror . . .

Rarely have I been so startled as I was by that voice. In an instant, I was in the hall. A red light streamed through the open door of the apartment opposite, silhouetting a woman's figure, staring, with clasped hands . . .

I sprang past her, pulled down the burning curtains, and threw them into the hall, where Higgins, who had run up the stairs, stamped out the flames. The room was full of smoke, but it was evident that the fire had spread no farther. I opened the window, and the smoke was whirled away.

"That was lucky," was Higgins's comment, as he stood panting in the doorway. "By cricky! I'm all in a tremble. I thought it was another murder!"

I couldn't help laughing as I looked at him gasping excitedly for breath.

"You've got murder on the brain," I said. "I hope there won't be any more at the Marathon."

"So do I," he agreed, and gathering up the fragments of the curtains, turned to go.

"Ah, bon dié!" cried Mrs. Tremaine, in a queerly broken but very charming mixture of French and English. "What a chance! What good fortune that you were in your room, missié!"

She had closed the window with a nervous shiver at the cold, and then stepped back into the full light. I fairly gasped as I looked at her. Charming she had been gowned according to the New York fashion; now she was radiant in a costume whose gorgeousness seemed just the setting her beauty needed. At the moment, it completely dazzled me, but I was able afterwards, in a calmer mood, to analyse it—the crimson petticoat, the embroidered chemise with its fold upon fold of lace, showing through the silken shoulder-scarf; the necklace of gold beads, and bracelets, studs, brooches—what not. The sight of Higgins standing

staring at this vision with open mouth brought me to my senses.

"I am very happy to have been there, madame," I said, and started toward the door.

"But you will not go," she protested. "Missié Tremaine will be here in a moment. He will desire to thank you.'

The words were accompanied by a smile there was no resisting. I faltered, stopped . . .

Higgins was still staring from the hall. Mrs. Tremaine stepped forward and calmly shut the door in his face.

In that instant a quick shiver ran through me, as though I had been suddenly imprisoned with a wild beast—a shiver that had in it something fearfully delightful. And let me add here that the emotion which Cecily, for so I came to know her, raised in me was not in the least admiration in the ordinary sense of the term, but rather an overpowering fascination, such as one sometimes feels in watching a magnificent tigress pacing back and forth in her cage. Such, I believe, was the feeling she inspired in most men; even in Tremaine himself.

She smiled at me again as she swept past me to a couch in one corner, and sank upon it.

"Sit, missié," she said, and motioned me to a chair close at hand. "I was very lonesome; I was weary of talking to my own body."

I cannot reproduce the soft dialect she spoke; any effort to do so makes it appear grotesque, so I shall not try. At first, it puzzled me occasionally, but I soon came to understand her perfectly.

"So was I," I said, smiling at the quaint expression. "I was growing very sick of my own body. Have you been in New York long?"

"Less than a month, missié; and I do not like it—it is too cold—too grey."

"Ah, you have come in a bad time," I said, wondering at her almost childish expression of misery. "Wait until June—then you will see!"

"June! Ah, we shall not remain so long—I, at least! I have promised to stay one month longer, but more than that—impossible!"

She reached out and took up a cigarette from a pile which lay on a tabouret beside the couch.

"It was thus the curtains caught," she laughed, and, after a whiff or two, flung the still-blazing taper over her shoulder. "Pouf!—and they were all in flame. A moment before, I was longing for excitement—any excitement whatever—but that sudden burst of fire frightened me—I rushed out—cried for help—and," she finished with a charming little gesture, "spoiled your smoke. Try one of these."

There was no resisting her—it was like playing with fire. I took a cigarette and lighted it.

"At Fond-Corré there was much to do," she continued, with a little sigh. "Here there is nothing but to smoke, smoke!"

"Fond-Corré?" I queried.

"Just beyond St. Pierre," she explained, closing her eyes with delight at the memory. "There was our home—I can see it again, in its grove of cocoa trees running down to the grey sand, with the waves lap-

ping gently over it. Tambou! how I sigh for it!" and she stretched her arms above her head with a gesture of infinite longing.

Looking at her, I began to believe that I was dreaming all this; that I had fallen asleep in my chair and been transported to the land of Haroun-el-Raschid. I had never seen a woman like her—so full of colour, of passion, of . . .

A key rattled in the lock, the door opened and a man came in. It was quite in keeping with the dream—the enraged husband with naked cimeter—even here in New York it was hardly the proper thing to be discovered thus, though not till that instant had I thought of it.

"Ah, now," I said to myself, "stilettos and pistols! you're in a ticklish place, my friend."

But before I could rise, Cecily had sprung from the couch and thrown her arms about his neck.

"Oh, comment on yé, doudoux?" she asked, in a voice like—well, I have never heard anything to compare with it.

"Toutt douce, chê—et ou?" he answered, and kissed her; then he perceived me, seemingly for the first time, though this I somehow doubted. "Good-evening, sir," he said, standing with his arm still about his wife and gazing at me with a look so sharp that I found myself for an instant unable to meet it, as though I had really been guilty of some fault.

His wife uttered in his ear a sentence so rapid that I was utterly unable to catch the words, but I suppose it explained the reason of my presence, for he turned to me instantly with outstretched hand.

"Cecily tells me that your presence of mind prevented a general conflagration, Mr.——"

"Lester," I said. "I am your neighbour across the hall."

"My name is Tremaine, and I'm exceedingly glad to meet you," he continued, with a courtesy which charmed me from the first moment. "We must pour a libation to honour the escape."

Cecily, who had been hanging on his lips, flew to the next room and was back in a moment with decanter and glasses—three of them—and she joined us with an imperturbable matter-of-course air which somewhat surprised me. Only I noticed she left a little wine in her glass, and with it she approached a square cage of fine gilt mesh hanging over the radiator in the warmest corner of the room.

I happened to look at Tremaine and was astonished at the intensity of the glance he sent after her. So absorbed was he that for the first time I had the opportunity to examine him closely. It was impossible to tell his age, there was about him such an air of exhaustless youth—he might have been anywhere from thirty to forty-five. He was a handsome man, with a dark, fascinating face which somehow matched his wife's. The power of his eye I had already experienced, and the square jaw and clear-cut lips bespoke an extraordinary power of will to match. He perhaps felt my scrutiny, for he turned to me, shaking off with an effort the spell that held him.

"She's a most extraordinary woman," he said, with a smile that seemed a little forced. "She's about to do what no other woman in the world would

dare do, and she thinks nothing of it. Come and see."

Cecily had already reached the cage, and was bending over it, humming a weird little refrain that rose and fell and turned upon itself, reminding me faintly of the negro spirituals I had once heard at a camp-meeting in the Jersey woods. After a moment, I saw a movement within the cage, and a head erected itself, a broad, triangular head, deep orange barred with black, with eyes like coals of fire. It swayed to and fro, to and fro, as Cecily fitted words to the refrain—queer, chopped-off Creole words.

"Oh, ou jojolli, oui! Oh, thou art pretty, pretty, Fê-Fê! Pa ka fai moin pé! I do not fear her, not at all! Fê-Fê is the work of the good God. Travaill Bon-Dié joli? Is she not pretty?"

Gradually we had drawn nearer, Tremaine and I, and I felt myself yielding to the fascination of the song, even as the serpent did. It was not very large, nor seemingly very formidable, so I did not even think of fear when Cecily opened the little door of the cage and drew it forth. She held it between thumb and finger just behind the head, and by a slight pressure she forced its jaws apart. Then she poured the wine down its throat, drop by drop. Finally she returned it to its cage and shut the door.

When it was over and she was lying again on the couch, panting with a kind of fearful exhaustion, I turned to Tremaine, who was mopping his forehead feverishly.

"I've got a kind of superstitious horror of that snake," he said apologetically, as he met my eyes.

"I've seen a lot of them, but none ever affected me just as this one does."

"What is it?" I asked, astonished by his pallor, by the trembling of his hand as he put away his handkerchief and reached for a cigarette. He lighted it before he answered, inviting me by a gesture to help myself

"It's a fer-de-lance," he said, at last; "one of the deadliest serpents in the world—and this particular variety is said to be especially deadly—a sort of crème de la crème, as it were. Its bite kills a man in three minutes, if it happens to strike an artery—it does more than that—it turns him to a swollen, rotten piece of carrion—I've seen it," and he leaned back to blow a ring toward the ceiling.

I sat, petrified, with my cigarette half-way to my mouth

"A fer-de-lance!" I faltered, at last, with a horrified glance at the figure on the couch.

"Oh, it's safe enough, I guess," he added. "She's had it for years and it has never attempted to harm her. Perhaps it has lost its poison."

"Still," I said, "it's a risk. I shouldn't think you'd permit it."

"Permit it?" he repeated. "Oh!" and he shrugged his shoulders with a gesture of impotence impossible to describe.

CHAPTER III

A Break in a Circle

MY acquaintance with the Tremaines, in the weeks that followed, grew by imperceptible degrees into an intimacy which was one of the most pleasant of my life. Of Cecily I have already attempted to give some idea, although I realise how cold and inadequate it is. As I began to know her better, I came to wonder more and more at her complexity, her simplicity, her swift change of mood, her utter ignorance of social convention. Another thing I saw, and that was her absolute worship of Tremaine. I question if he fully understood its strength; he had grown, in a way, accustomed to it; but to a stranger, an outsider, it was startlingly apparent. I say startlingly, because one was vaguely conscious of unsounded, threatening depths beneath that sweet exterior, which promised I know not what of passion and tragedy, should they be rudely stirred.

As for Tremaine, I hesitate to say how utterly I fell under his spell. Yet this was not in the least to be wondered at. My life had been, on the whole, so narrow, and his had been so broad; my experience of the world had been cast in the usual grooves, while his had so evidently overleaped them, had struck out a path for itself into all sorts of unexpected places. Why he so exerted himself to charm and conquer me

I do not yet fully understand—perhaps it was the mere delight in power, in the exercise of his dazzling faculties; or perhaps it was that he had leisure, that his mind was not yet engrossed in the game on which he staked so much.

I have said that his life had been cast in many curious places. Martinique was only the last of these, the most recent, and I gathered that the business which brought him to New York was the forming of a syndicate to build a railroad through the island. Through is the right word, for it was evident that, owing to the island's peculiar formation, there would have to be much tunnelling. But he waved all such practical difficulties aside and discoursed of the great future before such a road with an enthusiasm that was absolutely convincing.

I remember one evening he got fairly started upon this hobby of his and talked uninterruptedly for at least an hour—facts, details, descriptions at his finger-ends. Cecily, chin in hands, listened intent to every word, and I, with the remembrance of that evening still fresh upon me, can understand how he won the ear of even Wall Street's suspicious denizens. And, indeed, it was a wonderful prospectus which he painted—broad sugar plantations with no market, the whole traffic of the island carried upon the heads of women; the great sand-heaps of the east coast ninety per cent. pure steel, waiting only for development, but worthless now because no ship can approach them—and I know not what beside, but all of which, I have no doubt, was substantially true.

Perhaps I am lingering unduly over this portrait

of Tremaine, but I have never met his equal for daring, for audacity, for personal magnetism. In the days that followed, I was to see less and less of him, but the memory of those first evenings is a living and vivid one. I can see him sitting there yet before me with his wonderful eyes, his expressive face, his lithe, graceful form and his slim, white nervous hand holding his cigarette. I found myself speculating sometimes as to his nationality. French he seemed unquestionably by temperament, and yet he spoke English with a facility and carelessness unusual in a foreigner. I was often tempted to ask him, straight out, but a feeling of hesitation always held me back. I came at last to the conclusion that he was of French parentage, but had lived in England or America probably from his youth.

I had just come in from dinner one evening and was settling down to a reperusal of "L'Affaire Lerouge," when there came a knock at the door and Tremaine entered. He was in evening dress and was seemingly much perturbed.

"My dear Lester," he began abruptly, in that quick, nervous way of his, "I'm in the deuce of a box, and I'm going to ask you to help me out. I promised Cecily to take her to-night to see the extravaganza at the New York and have the seats here, but at the last moment I find I can't get away. I've a business engagement that I can't afford to break, but Cecily will never forgive me if I disappoint her. Have you anything on for to-night?"

"No," I answered, looking at him in some astonishment, for it was evident what was coming.

"Then perhaps you wouldn't mind taking Cecily? It would be a tremendous favour."

"Not at all," I assured him, "but——"

"It isn't quite *convenable?*" he finished, as I hesitated. "Surely, we don't need to stand on ceremony, and Cecily doesn't care a hang for convention. It's a great favour to both of us. She'll cry her eyes out if she has to stay at home, and I simply can't take her."

"Very well," I said, "I'll be glad to take her," and thanking me again, he hurried away.

She was dressed and waiting for me when I knocked at her door, and she caught me by both hands as I entered.

"This is good of you!" she cried. "Doudoux has been so busy for many days that we have gone nowhere; but he promised me to-night. Oh, I should not have stayed at home! I should have gone alone! I care not for the eyes of the men!"

"Oh, I shan't let you go alone!" I protested, and watched her, fascinated, as she put on a little bonnet and gave her hair two or three final pats before the mirror.

She was in the highest spirits, singing to herself—really, I told myself, only a child—and at last she swung around and dropped me a courtesy.

"How is that, chè?" she cried, smiling up at me. "Does that please you?"

"Charming!" I cried, gasping a little, with a feeling of giddiness, as I looked down into her eyes.

"Then in a moment," and turning, she struck a match and touched it to a wick floating on olive oil

in a tiny glass before an image of the Virgin, which hung in a little chapelle against the wall. She made a genuflection and turned back to me. "Now I am ready," she said, and tucked her hand confidingly under my arm.

"What is the light for, Cecily?" I asked, as we left the room.

"Oh," she explained, "faut limé lampe ou pou fai la Vierge passé dans caïe-ou. Now the Virgin will watch over me while I am away. But you are a Protestant. You do not care for the Virgin."

She looked up at me reproachfully, with a little sigh because I must be damned.

"But Tremaine—is he not also a Protestant?" I asked.

"Oh, no," she answered, shaking her head. "Certainly not—not at all. He even at one time thought of becoming a priest."

"A priest!" I repeated, astonished. Here was news, indeed, and I was so absorbed in it that I did not resent Higgins's stare of astonishment as we went down together in the elevator. Tremaine a priest! Yet, why not? No doubt he would have made a most successful one—an ideal Jesuit, for example, rising to a high place.

"Then why did he not become one?" I questioned, when we were seated in our cab and bowling along toward Broadway. A sudden fever of eagerness to probe into Tremaine's past took possession of me.

"I do not know," she answered; then she looked at me with a sudden quizzical narrowing of the eyes. "Perhaps he found the vows of a repugnance."

We swung around into Broadway, ablaze with light, and Cecily forgot me in the excitement of watching the changing crowd, the brilliant shop-fronts.

"Here we are," I said, as the cab drew up at the curb, and sprang out and helped her down.

As we entered the foyer, I heard that murmur of surprise and admiration which I knew my companion must inevitably call forth. As for her, she was interested in everything; the lights, the colour, the movement of the crowd, the bustle of the great theatre combined to form an excitant which brought the deep blood surging to her cheeks. She looked around with half-open lips, smiling, pleased as a child, seemingly quite unconscious of the many curious eyes centred upon her.

"Oh, it is glorious!" she cried. "I have to thank you again, che."

"You have nothing like this at St. Pierre?" I questioned, laughing at her eagerness.

"No," and she shook her head; "except perhaps the Carnival."

"I'm enjoying it, too," I said; and, indeed, I was, for her happiness was contagious. She seemed charged with electricity, overflowing, communicating it by a look, a word, a smile.

We went up to the promenade after the first act, and ate an ice together. The place was crowded, and Cecily soon became again the centre of attraction. Men strolled past merely to look at her, and from more than one woman I caught a flash of the eye that said unutterable things. The advent of a new, incomparable siren could not pass unchallenged. At them

all, Cecily glanced from time to time with admirable nonchalance; one would have sworn she had been reared in New York. She chatted gaily, eating her ice, sipping her wine, looking at me with eyes that glowed like stars. Then suddenly, as she looked up, her face changed. I glanced up, too, and caught Jim Godfrey's astonished eyes fixed on mine. He bowed and passed on.

"Who is that gentleman?" demanded Cecily eagerly, leaning across the table toward me. "You know him?"

"Oh, quite well," I answered, more and more surprised. "His name is Godfrey."

"God-frey," she repeated slowly, after me, as though fixing it indelibly in her memory. "And what is his business?"

"He's a reporter by trade; he gathers news for a paper," I added, seeing that she did not wholly understand.

"Oh," she said, and breathed a deep sigh of relief. "I see." Then, as she met my glance, she added, "I fancied that I had met him somewhere; I was mistaken. In New York I have met no one except you, missié."

But I scarcely heard her; my eyes had dropped to a pin at her throat, as she leaned forward. I could see it very clearly—an opal surrounded by a blazing ring of diamonds. I looked at it mechanically—then with a sudden, intent interest. For one link of that brilliant ring was missing; one of the diamonds had fallen out.

CHAPTER IV

The Problem of the Diamond

I WAS scarcely surprised when Godfrey's card was brought in to me at the office next morning. Both Mr. Graham and Mr. Royce happened to be out at the time, so that I had the inner room to myself, and I directed that Godfrey be shown in at once.

"I was expecting you," I said, rising to shake hands with him. "That stare of yours last night warned me that you'd be around to demand an explanation."

"Demand is hardly the word," he corrected, as he sat down. "Beseech would be nearer it. I confess I was never more surprised in my life than when I saw you sitting there calmly chatting away with Mrs. Tremaine."

"Then you *have* met her? She thought she was mistaken."

"You mean she knew me?" he asked quickly.

"She asked who you were—she fancied she'd met you somewhere."

Godfrey laughed a little dry laugh.

"She has," he said, "but it's strange she remembers it, for I'll swear she never looked at me—or perhaps," he added, knitting his brows, "she has some special reason to remember. I happened to be in the hall of the Marathon apartment house talking with Higgins, the janitor, when she and her husband came

in from dinner the night that man Thompson was killed there—perhaps you remember about it?"

I nodded, smiling.

"Yes, I remember."

Something in my face caught his attention.

"You mean you know something about it?" he asked quickly. But a movement of feet across the floor outside interrupted him. "We can't talk here," he said. "Will you be at home to-night?"

"Yes."

"Then I'll look you up," and he turned to go.

"Wait a minute," I said. "I'm not with Mrs. Fitch any more."

"Aren't you?"

"No—I'm quartered at the Marathon."

"At the Marathon?"

"Yes—suite fourteen—Higgins will show you up."

He stared at me an instant with starting eyes. Then the door opened and Mr. Royce came in, followed by two clerks.

"I'll look for you this evening," I added, hugely enjoying his stupefaction.

He nodded mechanically, and turned away, walking like a man in a dream.

"Well," began Godfrey, as he settled back in his chair and looked around the room, "this is about the last place on earth I'd have expected to find you."

"And yet it's not so wonderful," I pointed out. "I had to change my lodgings and found that these would suit."

"It's in your blood," he went on, smiling. "It has-

been ever since that affair of Miss Holladay. You'll never get it out. But I'm glad you're here. I've an idea that we're just on the threshold of a very remarkable mystery, and you can help a lot."

"Then the murder wasn't the end?"

"No; I fancy it was only the beginning. Now tell me how you happened to be with Mrs. Tremaine last night."

"Tremaine had an important business engagement," I said, "which he couldn't break. He'd promised to take her to the theatre and had secured seats. Rather than disappoint her, he asked me to take his place."

"And she didn't object?"

"She made the best of it, I guess."

"She seemed to be getting a good deal of fun out of it."

"She was. She's the most unconventional creature I ever met. She'd interest you, Godfrey."

"I don't doubt it in the least. But Tremaine interests me, too. You don't happen to know what this business engagement was?" and he looked at me with a queer smile.

"No; I suppose that it had something to do with his railroad."

"His railroad?"

I related briefly the project in which Tremaine was engaged.

"Well, perhaps it was connected with that," Godfrey said, when I had finished, "but indirectly—very indirectly. He spent the evening in Dickie Delroy's box at the opera.

It was my turn to stare.

"Are you sure?"

"Quite sure—I saw him there. Tremaine, I understand, was taken up by Delroy some time ago and has been cutting quite a swath in society—it's easy enough to understand why. That's not the first time he's been in the Delroy box."

"But," I asked, more and more astonished, "how did he accomplish it?"

"I don't know. A polished fellow like that has an open sesame, sometimes. More than likely, he's interested Delroy in his railroad scheme, and Delroy has become fascinated with him, just as you've evidently been."

"Yes," I admitted, candidly, "I have."

"I saw at a glance that he's a smooth one. I believe that railroad business is just a blind—he doesn't look the man to waste his time building castles in the air."

"Oh, if you could hear him!" I protested.

"I wish I could."

"I can introduce you—as a reporter looking for a story, say."

"No, it won't do. I'll try to get at him some other way."

"I don't believe it's a blind," I persisted. "His heart's too deeply in it. Besides, I don't see that we have any reason to suspect him of anything. If it's a blind, what's his real game?"

"I give it up. That's just what we've got to find out."

"Godfrey," I said suddenly, "there's two points I'd like to submit to you—both rather important on

I fancy. But first I want you to tell me the story of the crime, just as it occurred. I suspect there were some details that didn't get into the *Record*. Start a cigar first."

He took a cigar and struck a match.

"There were," he assented with a smile, "a number of details that didn't get before the public. Most of them have an unfortunate tendency to implicate Miss Croydon."

"Miss Croydon?"

"Yes; I don't mean implicate her in the actual crime—I don't for an instant believe she had any hand in that; but they seem to indicate that she wasn't frank with us—that she's concealing something—protecting somebody. Now there wasn't any use in telling the fool public that; they'd jump at once to the conclusion—why," he broke off, abruptly, with some heat, "even as it was——"

"Yes," I said, somewhat surprised at his irritation, "I noticed the shots at her."

"Some of them were outrageous! It's a shame that such a woman as that—but you shall judge," and he told me the story substantially as I have set it down in the first chapters of this history. "There isn't the least doubt," he added, "that she took the clippings from Thompson's pocket-book, and I think it very improbable that she has told us the whole truth concerning the minor details of the crime, but nevertheless she's innocent."

He get up and walked across the room and placed his finger over a little hole in the woodwork of the bedroom door.

"There's where the bullet from her revolver struck," he said. "There's no doubt about that—it was taken out and found to fit. I'd give a good deal to know who it was she fired at and why she fired. I tell you, Lester, the more one thinks about that affair, the more incomprehensible it becomes, there are so many questions which seem unanswerable. Who was Thompson? How did he get in condition to receive her? Was the murderer a friend of Thompson's? If not, how did he get into the rooms? Above all, why, after he had knocked Thompson down, should he stand over him and shoot him through the heart? That savours more of a wild beast than of a human being."

He paused a moment in a sort of helpless perplexity, then sat down abruptly and turned to me.

"What were your points?" he asked.

"The first," I said, looking at him, "will, I fear, help to tip the scale against Miss Croydon. She came here the morning after the inquest and tried to rent this apartment."

He stared at me, astounded, his cigar in the air, while I repeated the story Higgins had told me. When I had finished, he sat gazing into vacancy, his lips compressed

"I see it puzzles you," I said, at last, enjoying his perplexity. "I confess I couldn't make anything out of it."

"Puzzles me!" he repeated, getting up again and walking nervously about the room. "Why, it's the most astounding thing I ever heard—it's the most unexplainable feature of this whole unexplainable case. I

should think she'd never want to enter these rooms again. But perhaps Higgins was mistaken," he added, stopping short.

"That might be," I admitted, "though he swears he wasn't."

"Well, let's pass over it for a moment. What's the second point? Is it another staggerer?"

"Not a staggerer—but another twist to the puzzle, I imagine. Did Thompson have any jewelry on him?"

"Jewelry? Not a bit. He was practically in rags."

"Where was his body lying?"

"Right here," and he indicated the spot with his foot.

"And right there," I said, "two days later, I found this, pressed into the carpet," and I took the little paper packet from my pocket-book.

He opened it carefully and looked at what lay inside. Then he whistled softly.

"A diamond, by all that's wonderful!"

"Tell me what it came out of," I said.

"One of a group, I should say; or perhaps a border around a larger central stone."

"Precisely," I nodded. "And last night I happened to notice that Mrs. Tremaine wore a pin with just such an arrangement of stones. One of the small diamonds in the border was missing."

Godfrey wrapped up the tiny bit of crystal and handed it back to me with an exceedingly thoughtful face.

"That's a mighty pretty bit of evidence," he said,

at last; "though, of course, it may be only a coincidence. Taken by itself, it isn't worth a cent; in connection with other evidence, it would be worth a great deal."

"And there isn't any other?"

"Just one little bit. You say Tremaine comes from Martinique. Well, among Thompson's clothes I found a peculiar nut, called a snake nut, which grows only in the West Indies. When you add to this that Thompson's clothing was all such as is worn in the tropics, the presumption is pretty strong that he lived for a while somewhere in Tremaine's neighbourhood."

I nodded; then my face fell.

"After all," I pointed out, "all that amounts to nothing. Both Tremaine and his wife can prove an alibi. They weren't in the building when the crime was committed. You yourself saw them coming back."

"Yes—but it's a significant fact that no one saw them go out."

"Oh, well," I said, with a sudden revulsion of feeling, "that doesn't prove anything, either. We mustn't let our suspicions carry us away, Godfrey. If you knew the Tremaines, you'd see how ridiculous it is to suspect them—on no better evidence than this, anyway."

"I don't suspect them," corrected Godfrey, smiling. "I'm simply seeking the truth. If the Tremaines are innocent, as they very probably are, it will do them no harm for us to investigate them a little."

"No," I agreed; "of course not."

"And that's just what I want you to do. You're

here on the inside. Keep your eyes and ears open. In the meantime, I'll set our newspaper machinery at work to look up Tremaine's career. Maybe, in that way, we'll get enough foundation to start a theory on."

"And the diamond?"

"The diamond may not have come from the pin, at all. It's no uncommon thing to lose a stone like that. Or if it did, she may have dropped it here at some other time—perhaps she was in here the next day to have a look at the body."

"I doubt that," I objected. "She's not a woman who'd have a curiosity for that sort of thing."

"Well, we'll puzzle it out in time. If I only had a chance to study Tremaine, to hear him talk, to watch him without being seen. That would be worth more to me than all this theorising. Then I'd have my feet on solid ground; I could—sh!—who's that?"

A door opened and a step crossed the hall. There came a tap at my door.

Godfrey shot me one electric glance; then, lightly as a panther, he seized coat and hat and disappeared into the bedroom, leaving the door slightly ajar.

CHAPTER V

A Flash from the Depths

"I HAVE come to thank you for your kindness of last night," said Tremaine, as he entered. "It was a great favour."

"It was nothing," I protested, waving him to a chair. "I was glad to do it. I had a very pleasant time myself."

As he sat down, he laid a handful of cigarettes on the table beside him.

"You see I've come for a chat," he said, with his inimitable smile. "I hope you will help yourself."

"Thank you," and I suited the action to the word: Tremaine's cigarettes would have tempted anyone. "I trust the business of the railroad is getting on well?"

"Splendidly!" he answered, inhaling a great puff of smoke. "The interview of last night did much to assist it. It was for that also I wished to thank you—for leaving me free—it was most important."

I waved my cigarette deprecatingly. I was conscious that he was watching me keenly.

"I am not interrupting any plans of yours?" he asked suddenly. "You were not going out? You're not expecting visitors?"

"No," I said, "I'd resigned myself to spend the

evening over a book. Your company is very welcome."

"That is good of you to say. I shall speak frankly, then, as I had intended doing."

He paused and puffed at his cigarette. I saw that, in spite of his superb assurance, the subject, whatever it was, presented a certain difficulty.

"I have been curious to see," he began, at last, "how Cecily would affect New Yorkers. She is certainly well stared at."

"And no wonder!" I said. "She would make St. Anthony turn his head."

"You really weren't bored last night?"

"I don't see how anybody could be bored with Cecily," I answered with conviction.

"Ah, you think so?" and he shot me a quick glance. "You admire her, then?"

"Admiration is hardly the word," I said slowly. "It is too weak, too thin—"

Evidently he misunderstood me, for he did not wait for me to finish—to explain myself.

"That makes it easier for me," he interrupted. "You have perhaps suspected that the union between us is not a—ah—a legal one?"

"Yes," I said, "I had suspected that."

"Such unions are the rule in Martinique," he continued calmly, "and have been from time immemorial. They are a part of the life there—they are a matter of course—and frequently they are as permanent and happy as any regular one could be. Cecily is what is known as a fille de couleur, physically, I believe, the most beautiful women in the world."

"Then she is not an exception?"

"Oh, no—she's a type—physically, at least. Mentally, I believe she does differ somewhat from the typical capresse. For instance, I never knew another attempt to tame a fer-de-lance."

"It seemed to me," I observed "that she had as many possibilities as the snake."

He laughed lightly.

"For evil, you mean? That's merely the effect of the first view. Really, the capresse girls have an excellent reputation for docility and all the rest. Not that it would matter much in Martinique—the people there are used to living over a volcano and don't mind. Of course," he added, in another tone, "I shall, before long, have to break it off. Society, here, is differently organised—different climates, different morals, you know; I feel that I must conform to it. Indeed, I even wish to do so. It is time that I settled down, ranged myself, became a man of family—I have been a wanderer long enough. Cecily can't endure this climate, anyway. I'll send her back to St. Pierre."

"What will she say to that?" I asked, with a vivid memory of the adoring way her eyes always dwelt upon him.

"You think it sounds a little brutal?" and he smiled gaily. "It isn't, in the least. You've put Cecily on too high a pedestal. They have an axiom down there, 'Née de l'amour, la fille-de-couleur nit d'amour, de rires, et d'oublis'—her life is a thing of love, laughter, and forgettings. I think it's essentially true. At the same time," he added, more seriously, "I don't wish to

be needlessly cruel. That's the reason I'm telling you all this. It's a sort of introduction."

"Ah," I said, and looked at him.

"I'll blurt it out in a word. I'll be out of town next week—all week—my business demands it—and it's absurd for me to think of taking Cecily with me—it's absolutely impossible—it would ruin the whole affair. What I want to ask you is this—look in on her occasionally, cheer her up, take her to the theatre, if you'll be so good. She knows no one here, and she has a ridiculous need of companionship, of chattering to someone, of having someone to admire her. It's born in the blood, I suppose; it's an inheritance from two centuries of ancestors. Left to herself, she'll soon mope herself sick. Will you do this for me, my friend?"

There was a compelling wizardry in his eyes as he looked at me, yet I had self-control enough to pause and reflect. Still, I saw no reason why I should refuse, even had my own inclination not greatly urged me forward. Here would be an opportunity to unveil such secrets of his as Cecily might know—especially as to where they had been on the evening of the murder. Perhaps she even knew the victim: could give me a clew to the connection between him and Tremaine, if such a connection existed—there were unlimited possibilities. And yet, a feeling of shame held me back. To take advantage in this way of a man who trusted me, against whom there was nothing but the merest, most intangible suspicion . . .

I looked up and met his intent gaze.

"You were re[illegible]ng?" he said.

"Merely that it is a delicate trust. I'm not at all unwilling to undertake it, only——"

Again he misunderstood; again he did not wait for me to finish. It was the only weakness I ever detected in him—he made a false step that could never be retraced.

"Only you are flesh and blood, you would say?" and he shot me a smile which illumined as a lightning flash the depths of his character. "On that score, do not worry, I beg of you; I am not of a jealous disposition—I shall not——"

A knock at the door interrupted him, or I might have answered in a way that would have wrecked Godfrey's plan forever. I flung the door open and saw Higgins standing there.

"A call at th' telephone fer you, Mr. Lester," he said.

"Excuse me, please," I called over my shoulder to Tremaine, and strode down the hall after the janitor. So heated was I with anger, so shaken by this sudden revelation, that not till we were in the elevator dropping downward did I remember that Godfrey was in my bedroom. A sudden chill struck through me. Suppose Tremaine should take advantage of the opportunity to examine my rooms; suppose he should discover Godfrey . . .

It was too late now to avert it; I could not go back, so I went on to the telephone. It was Mr. Royce who wanted me; he had been called suddenly out of town and wished to give me some instructions for the next day. Our conversation lasted perhaps five minutes; then I hung up the receiver and mounted to my rooms.

With a hand not wholly steady, I opened the door. Tremaine was sitting in the chair where I had left him and was just lighting another cigarette.

He arose with a smile as I came in.

"I must be going," he said. "And you will keep an eye on Cecily."

"Yes, I'll be glad to," I assented. Surely, I need hesitate at no means to learn the truth about him.

"And be as gay as you please," he added. "You're doing me a great favour, which I shall take care to repay some day. Good-night."

"Good-night," I answered and closed the door.

As I turned, Godfrey walked calmly out of the bedroom. I waited till I heard Tremaine's door close. Then I opened mine softly and looked up and down the hall. It was empty.

"You're getting cautious," said Godfrey, as I closed the door a second time.

"Yes. I'm beginning to fear him. You heard—"

"Every word."

"And what do you think of him?"

"I think," said Godfrey slowly, "that he's one of the most consummate scoundrels I ever had to deal with. However, we'll unmask him—he's letting us into his citadel."

"Yes," I said, "and I hesitated—"

"I saw you did; and I was trembling for fear you'd refuse—your notions of honour are a little too finely drawn."

"I think I should have refused," I said, "if I hadn't been called away to the telephone, and so had time to

cool off a bit and think it over. I don't understand yet how he came to strike such a false note."

"It's the Latin blood in him. They never can comprehend the Anglo-Saxon point of view."

"Perhaps that's it. By the way," I added suddenly, "that was mighty lucky."

"It was uncommonly lucky," he agreed, with an enigmatic smile.

"I mean his not looking through the rooms. I almost had a nervous chill when I remembered you were in there. But it was too late to come back."

"I'm glad you didn't come back—that would have spoiled everything."

"You mean he didn't sit still?"

"Not for an instant. I was sure he wouldn't, therefore as soon as I caught Higgins's errand, I dived behind your rain-coat. Luckily, it's a long one."

"Yes—and then?"

"And then he took a quick look through the bedroom—I heard him open the closet door and drop on one knee to glance under the bed. Then he went on into the bathroom, and finally came back again to the sitting-room."

"Well?" I asked, for I saw that there was something yet untold.

"Well," continued Godfrey, "after a minute or two, I thought it safe to venture out from under the rain-coat, more especially as certain peculiar sounds from the other room awakened my curiosity. The sounds were a sort of slow, regular scraping."

He paused a moment to look at me; I could only stare at him.

"I crept to the door and peeped through. Guess what I saw! You never could guess, though. Tremaine was crawling slowly about the room, running his hands carefully over the carpet. He was searching for the diamond."

CHAPTER VI

A Trap for Tremaine

"WELL," I said, at last, "it seems to me we're weaving a pretty strong chain about our friend Tremaine. But why should he have waited this long to look for the diamond?"

"Perhaps he's just discovered its loss," suggested Godfrey.

"Or perhaps this is the first opportunity he's had. I've never before left him alone here, and I keep the snap on so that the door locks itself whenever it's closed."

Godfrey sat for a full minute motionless, his eyes fixed on the door.

"Of course," he said, at last, "it may not have been the diamond he was looking for, though I can't imagine what else it could be. But I've a theory I want to test. Suppose we take a look at your bedroom."

I followed him in and turned up the light. He glanced around keenly, and went finally to the closet, which was almost opposite the door leading into the sitting-room. He entered the closet and closed the door behind him. After a moment, I heard a scraping noise, and perceived a knife-blade working back and forth in a crack of the door. Finally the blade was withdrawn, the door opened, and Godfrey came

out. He examined the lock, tried it once or twice with the key, which was in it; then he turned to me.

"What time do you leave in the morning?" he asked.

"About seven-thirty."

"Seven-thirty—very well. Now I must be going. Look for me in the morning."

"In the morning?"

"Yes—I'll explain afterwards. Now let me out softly."

"Wait," I said, for I too had a sudden idea. "You have a photograph of Thompson, I suppose?"

"Yes, at the office."

"Bring it up in the morning with you. I should like to look at it."

"All right," he said, and after I had made sure that the coast was clear, he stole away upon tiptoe.

For a long time after he had gone, I sat and thought over the evening's events. In the first place, he had given me a complete and succinct story of the crime; I felt that I held in my hands all the details of the tragedy—all the threads that led toward its solution. As Godfrey had pointed out, the foundation was as yet too weak to support a theory—we needed more facts to build upon. The strands of circumstance we had woven about Tremaine were really mere cobwebs—any breath of wind might blow them away. Was there really any connection between him and Thompson? That they had both lived in the tropics proved nothing; and they could hardly have come to New

York together, since the Tremaines had arrived at the Marathon fully three weeks before Thompson appeared there

At least, I told myself, I could find out on which boat the Tremaines had come, since I knew the approximate date of their arrival. If Thompson proved to be a fellow-passenger of theirs we had taken an important step forward; if not, some other bit of evidence might possibly be stumbled upon. That should be my task for the luncheon-hour to-morrow; till then, I would permit myself to consider none of the other details of the mystery—I knew how easy it was to get inextricably tangled in a maze of conjecture—and with this resolve I went to bed.

But, as it happened, my noon hour was to be differently occupied. Scarcely was I out of bed next morning, when there came a light tap on my door and Godfrey slipped in the instant I opened it.

"I had a few properties to arrange," he explained, smiling, "and so thought I'd best come early."

He went on into the bedroom and opened the closet door. Then he took from his pocket a stout bolt, with screws and a screw-driver, and proceeded to affix it to the inside of the door.

"Now, my dear Lester," he said, rising when the task was finished, "I'll have to ask you to run up this noon and let me out."

"Let you out of where?"

"Out of the closet. You see, unfortunately, this lock works only from the outside, so you'll have to lock me in before you go. I've put on the bolt as an extra precaution."

"You mean you're going to spend the whole morning in that closet?"

"That's precisely what I mean."

"But you'll suffocate."

"No—you see I've cut a hole through. That will let in the air; besides, through it one can get an admirable view of the outer room."

"Ah!" I said, beginning to understand. "It's a trap!"

"Yes, a trap. Maybe we'll catch something and maybe we won't. What time do you usually go to lunch?"

"About one o'clock."

"That ought to bring you here by one-thirty. Very well; lock me in and take the key with you."

I did as he bade me, though not without some reluctance, and I confess that I thought of little else during the morning. How the hours dragged—and I pictured to myself Godfrey standing in that narrow space, cramped, half-suffocated, counting the minutes. Yet perhaps he did not find the time so long; perhaps before his eyes some drama was enacting . . .

One o'clock came at last, and I hurried out and took the Elevated uptown as the quickest way of getting there. It was just one-twenty when I opened my door; with a little shiver of apprehension, I inserted the key in the lock of the closet and threw back the bolt. Godfrey walked out on the instant. He was smiling, but pale with fatigue.

"If you've got such a thing as a nip of brandy anywhere about, Lester," he said, sinking into the nearest chair, "I'd be infinitely obliged for it. I feel rather shaky in the knees."

I brimmed a glass for him, and he set it down empty, with a sigh of satisfaction.

"That's better. Do you know, I thought for a time, toward the last, that I was going to collapse. One little crack is scarcely ventilation enough for an active pair of lungs. However, I was repaid."

"You were?"

"Yes," and he smiled at my impatience. "I'll tell you the story, and see what you make of it. First came the chambermaid, who performed her duties with neatness and despatch. Then a dreary half hour passed. I had about come to the conclusion that I might have spared my pains, when I caught the sound of a key in the lock of the outer door. I heard the door open and close, and an instant later our friend Tremaine appeared within my range of vision."

"Tremaine!" I exclaimed. "Then he had Thompson's key!"

"So it seems. Stole it most probably."

"But why?"

"Ah, if we knew that, we should know everything. I'm glad you didn't have the lock changed."

"So am I—it's added another link to the chain."

"Yes," agreed Godfrey, "and a strong one. But my story's only begun. Tremaine took a look through the rooms to assure himself that there was no one here. He tried the closet door, but didn't seem surprised or suspicious when he found it locked. Then he went back to the outer room, dropped on his hands and knees and began to search."

"For the diamond."

"So I thought, at first. I couldn't see him for a little

while, but presently I perceived that he wasn't searching over the body of the carpet, but around its edges. He seemed to be looking for a place where it was loose, for he went very slowly from tack to tack. Once I thought he had found it, for he came to a place where a tack was wanting, and ran his hand under eagerly. But in a moment he brought it out again empty."

"So it couldn't have been the diamond," I remarked in perplexity.

"No, it couldn't have been the diamond," assented Godfrey, his eyes shining. "But Tremaine wasn't done yet. Really, he'd make an admirable detective. I admired his methods—though they also gave me a clew to what he was looking for. He placed a chair just here, before this desk, just opposite the bedroom door—you'll remember that Thompson also had a table and chair similarly placed."

"Yes, I remember."

"Then he sat down in the chair and began a minute scrutiny of the walls—first that one yonder—he went over it inch by inch until he came to the speaking-tube. Then he sprang up and opened it and peered inside; even holding a lighted match in—let us see," and Godfrey also examined the tube. "It's empty."

"Yes," I said. "I've used it once or twice, and it works all right."

"Well, Tremaine wasn't satisfied with that. He ran his hands along the top ledges of the doors, mounted a chair and peered above the windows—examined every nook and cranny. At last he gave it up, replaced things just as he had found them, glanced

at his watch, and went away. Now what was he looking for?"

I cudgelled my brain.

"I don't know," I said. "I can't imagine."

"Let me help you," said Godfrey, his eyes shining still more brightly. "I had time to think it all out in the closet there. In the first place, he looked only in the outer room; in the second place, he was plainly looking for something that had been purposely concealed; in the third place, when he examined the room, he placed his chair just where Miss Croydon had sat."

A flash of light burst upon me.

"The clippings!" I cried.

"The clippings—just that. I haven't the least doubt of it. And that explains another thing which seemed very puzzling—it explains why Miss Croydon was so anxious to rent this suite. Of course, if she hid the clippings here, she was desperately anxious to recover them, and she'd have got them if Higgins hadn't been such a superstitious fool."

Yes, that was plain enough; what had appeared so mysterious was really quite simple, after all. It is so with most mysteries, if one can only see rightly. The trouble is that most of us persist in trying to look beneath the surface instead of examining what is in plain sight. The admirable C. Auguste Dupin was quite right in remarking that truth does not always lie at the bottom of a well.

"But how did he find out about them?" I asked, at last. "Simmonds decided to keep that point to himself, and you have told no one except me."

"I don't know—nor how he came to believe they were hidden here."

"Perhaps Miss Croydon told him," I suggested. "Perhaps she asked him to get them for her."

"No, I don't think so; if she'd done that, she'd have told him where she hid them. I think it much more probable that they contain some secret of his, and he's concluded she hasn't got them because she hasn't produced them against him. And he's reasoned correctly in supposing that if she hasn't got them, she must have hidden them here."

It was a good guess; an adroit one.

"The question is," added Godfrey, looking about him, "where did she hide them?"

I looked about, too, but I could think of no place which had escaped Tremaine's scrutiny.

"Perhaps it was in the table she sat before," said Godfrey, at last. "It must have been some place near at hand, instantly suggesting itself, for Simmonds and I were in the inner room only a minute or two."

"The table had only a single drawer," I said, "and I looked through it the night I engaged the rooms. It was empty. I don't see why Miss Croydon should have concealed the clippings at all; it seems to me that the most natural thing for her to do would be to put them in her pocket."

"No doubt," agreed Godfrey; "yet in a moment of excitement like that, the natural thing might be the very last thing she'd think of. Besides, she might have feared that she was to be placed under arrest, and of course she wouldn't want the clippings to be found on her. But there's no use sitting here

spinning theories. I feel in need of solid refreshment."

"So do I," I said, and we went down to the street together.

"By the way," he added, as we reached the door, "here's that photograph you asked me for."

I looked at it, at the coarse, bearded face with its closed eyes—the livid forehead, the full, sensual lips, the heavy, bloated nose. It was not a pleasant sight, but your police photographer does not aim at beauty—he scorns retouching and the other tricks of the trade—he strives only for truth.

"It's hard to imagine any connection between him and Tremaine," I remarked.

"Not half so hard as to imagine his connection with Miss Croydon," commented Godfrey; and I agreed with him.

CHAPTER VII

Success and Failure

WHEN I left the office at noon next day, I took a cross-town car which eventually landed me at the foot of West Tenth Street, where the red and black steamers of the Quebec line load and unload their West Indian cargoes. There were other lines plying to Martinique, but none with arrivals which approximated the date given me by Cecily, as I had found by reference to a file of the *Maritime Gazette*. Of the Quebec fleet, the *Parisine* had arrived on February 23d, and had sailed again on the 5th of March. A reference to the paper of the day before showed me that she had just arrived in port again. There, sure enough, she was, drawn up beside the dock, while two noisy donkey engines were putting away at the task of lifting great barrels of sugar from her hold. I hunted up the purser without delay.

"May I see your passenger list for your last trip north?" I asked; "the trip before this one."

"Certainly," he responded, and produced it.

It was not a long one, and in a moment I had found what I was looking for. Victor Tremaine and wife were fifth on the list. But no "H. Thompson" appeared there. However, I had a last resource—I had scarcely expected to find him entered among the pas-

"Is the captain aboard?" I inquired.

"Captain Hake has gone over to his home on Long Island for a day or two," answered the purser. "The first officer, Mr. Grice, is forward, superintending the unloading."

"Thank you," I said, and hurried up to the deck. I found Mr. Grice without difficulty, a tall, blond young man, with eyes of a cerulean blue. "Can you spare me a moment?" I asked, after I had introduced myself.

"Why, I guess so. What is it?"

"Did you ever see this man before?" and I produced the photograph Godfrey had given me.

"Well, I should say so!" he cried, at the first glance. "And I hope I'll never see him ag'in. Thompson his name is, and we shipped him at Barbadoes, in place of one of our men who deserted there. He didn't have a decent rag to his back, so we fitted him up with some old things out of the slop-chest."

I nodded; that explained the different initials marked on his clothing.

"He only shipped as far as St. Pierre," continued the mate; "but after we'd got there, he changed his mind and come on to New York. What's he been doin'? Gettin' into more trouble? He's not been out of jail more'n three or four weeks."

"Out of jail?"

"Yes—he was a regular fiend for booze, though we didn't find it out until after we left St. Pierre. Where he got it I don't know—he didn't have any money t' buy it, that's sure. I've kind o' thought one of the passengers must a' given it to him, though I

can't imagine why. But anyway, he was half-drunk three-fourths of the time and dead drunk the other fourth. We'd find him layin' in his berth and we'd yank him out and drop him into a tub of water. He'd sober up quicker 'n any man I ever see, but he was never satisfied unless he had a pint or two inside him. When we tied up at the wharf here, he got awful bad—wanted t' go ashore right away—fought the captain when he wouldn't let him. The captain handed him over to a policeman, and he got twenty days on the island."

I nodded again; so that was why he was so long after Tremaine in putting in an appearance at the Marathon.

"Let's see the picture," he added, and looked at it more closely. "That's the very son-of-a-gun. What's the matter with him, anyway? Asleep? Drunk more likely."

"No," I said, "he's dead."

"Dead? Drank hisself to death, hey?"

"No; somebody murdered him."

"Oh, shucks! What'd anybody want to murder him for? Most likely he was trvin' to kill somebody else and got a dose of his own medicine."

"That may be," I assented, [illegible] the suggestion was not without its merits. "We've been trying to find out something about him. Can you tell us anything?"

"Not a thing more'n I've told you. He was on the bum down there in Barbadoes [illegible]."

"Do you think the captain would know anything more?"

"No, I don't. Plant him in Potter's Field and good riddance. I'll bet he didn't get any more'n was comin' to him."

With which sage reflection, he turned back to his work, while I sought the shore. On the way back to the office, I turned the mate's story over in my mind. It had, at least, served to establish one thing—a connection, however slender, between Thompson and Tremaine. It was evident that Thompson had intended joining Tremaine at St. Pierre, but when he found him embarking on the *Parima*, stayed with the vessel so that they might reach New York together. That it was Tremaine who had supplied the other with spirits on the voyage north I did not doubt; Thompson, then, had some claim upon Tremaine—a claim, perhaps, of friendship, of association in crime; a claim, doubtless, to which those missing clippings gave the clew. If I could only find them! But Tremaine had searched for them with a thoroughness which had excited even Godfrey's admiration. No doubt Miss Croydon had them at this moment in the pocket of her gown; or perhaps she had destroyed them without realising their importance. But she must have realised it, or she would never have dared take them from that repulsive body; she must have known exactly what they contained, if they were the papers she had gone to suite fourteen to get . . .

I felt that I was getting tangled in a snarl of my own making, and I gave it up.

Godfrey came into the office that evening, just as I was closing my desk.

"I want you to go to dinner with me," he said. "I

have to run down to Washington to-night, and it may be three or four days before I get back. I want to talk things over."

We took a cab uptown and stopped at Riley's—the Studio, alas! had closed its doors—and we were presently ensconced in a snug corner, where we could talk without danger of being overheard.

"I've found out a few things about Tremaine," began Godfrey, as the waiter hurried away with our order.

"And I about Thompson," I said.

"You have?" and he looked at me in surprise. "How in the world did you do it?"

His astonishment was distinctly complimentary, and I related with considerable gratification my conversation with the mate of the *Parisiat*.

"Well," observed Godfrey, when I had finished, "that was a bright idea of yours—that establishes the link between the two men. Our St. Pierre correspondent wires us that Tremaine arrived there some three years ago, presumably from South America. He bought a little plantation just outside the town and settled there. He seemed to have plenty of money when he arrived, but he probably spent it all—on that girl Cecily, perhaps—for before he sailed, he borrowed thirty-five hundred francs with his plantation as security."

"Seven hundred dollars—that wouldn't go far," I commented.

"No—let's see just how far," and Godfrey drew the menu card toward him and made the following computation in one corner.

Passage,	$130
Incidentals on voyage,	20
Clothing for himself,	200
Clothing for Cecily,	200
One month's rent,	45
" " board,	120
" " incidentals,	150
Total,	$865

"You see, he hadn't enough to run him a month—and he's been here nearly twice that long. Besides, that estimate is much too low—for it's evident that he's an extravagant liver. He's been moving in expensive company and has, of course, been keeping up his end. Then, too, I don't doubt that he provided for Thompson—gave him enough money, anyway, to keep drunk on—that's the only way to explain Thompson's taking an apartment like that. I should say that fifteen hundred dollars would be a low estimate for the two months. Of course, he had to get all his clothing new—Martinique clothing wouldn't do for March New York."

"All of which indicates," I said, "either that he had other resources or that he's received some money—a thousand dollars, at least—since he's been here."

"Precisely—and I incline to the latter theory. He' working some sort of tremendous bunco game. He' playing for big stakes. He's not the man to play for little ones."

"No," I assented, "he's not," and we fell silent, while the waiter removed the dishes.

Over the cigars, afterwards, neither of us said much; we were both, I think, trying to find some ray of light

in the darkness. At last, Godfrey took out his watch and glanced at it.

"I must be going," he said, as he tore into little bits the menu card upon which he had made his computation. "My train leaves at nine."

We put on our coats and went out together. On the steps we paused.

"There's one thing, Lester," he said; "we're making progress, and he doesn't suspect us. That's our great advantage. Perhaps we may catch him off his guard. During the next week, keep your eyes open and find out how much Cecily knows. Another thing—keep a clear head—don't let that siren——"

"No danger," I interrupted, and half unconsciously I touched a ring on my finger.

He smiled as he saw the gesture.

"Oh, yes; I'd forgotten about that. Where is she now?"

"In Florida—she and her mother. They're coming north next month."

"Well," he said, "I'm glad you've got the ring—you'll need it this next week. I wish the chance was mine—Cecily, I'm sure, knows a good many interesting things about Tremaine. Besides, I haven't got your high moral scruples—I believe in fighting fire with fire. However, do your best. I'll look you up as soon as I get back. Good-bye."

I watched him until the crowd hid him: then I turned toward my rooms a little miserably. Without Godfrey to back me, I felt singularly weak and helpless. If Tremaine were really the finished scoundrel we supposed him, what chance had I against him?

But perhaps he was not; perhaps we were wide of the mark—looking for truth at the bottom of a well instead of on the mountain-top.

The next day was Saturday. Tremaine was to leave in the afternoon for his week's absence, and he came in before I left in the morning to say good-bye. He seemed strangely elated and triumphant; his eyes were even brighter than usual, the colour came and went in his cheeks—he presented, altogether, a most fascinating appearance. He lingered only a moment to shake hands and thank me again.

"Cecily is jealous of these last moments," he said, with a laugh. "She's a spoilt child—and like a child, her moods are only of the moment—she'll be gay as a lark to-morrow. Well, au revoir, my friend," and he waved his hand to me and closed the door behind him.

With the vision of him yet in my eyes, I saw clearly for the first time how weak and puny and ineffective was the chain of evidence which we were endeavouring to forge about him. He rose superior to it, shattered it, cast it aside, trampled on it contemptuously—emerged unstained. I had permitted myself to be blinded by Godfrey's prejudices—no unbiassed person would ever believe Tremaine guilty. Then I remembered that sudden, infernal smile he had cast at me two nights before, and some of the glory fell from him.

At the office, I found awaiting me a note from Godfrey, scribbled hastily in the station of the Pennsylvania road.

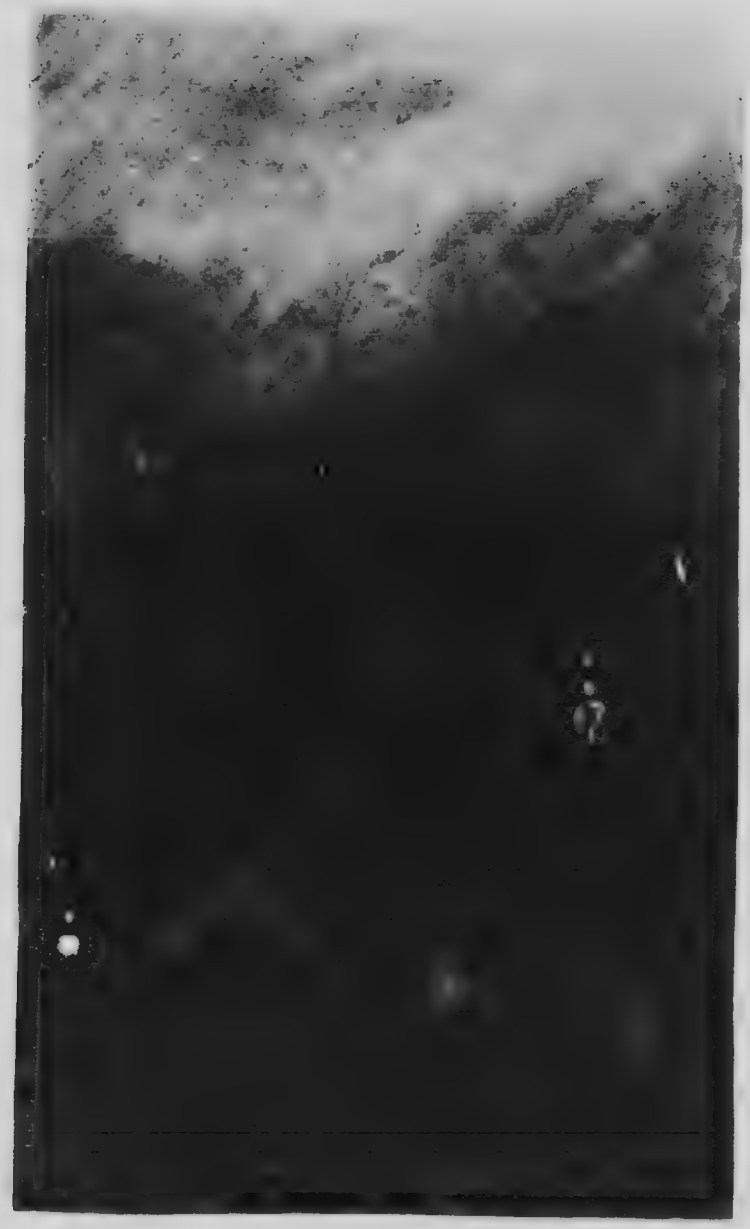
"DEAR LESTER [it ran]: By the merest good luck, I met Jack Drysdale just after I left you. Drysdale is betrothed to Miss Croydon, and is to be one of a little house party which Mrs. Delroy has arranged at her country house near Babylon, Long Island. Tremaine is to be a guest also! That is where he will spend the week, and it's evident he's going there with a purpose. I would give worlds to be there, but Drysdale has promised to keep a journal of events—he's willing to do a good deal for me—and to wire me if anything unusual happens. So I hope for the best. Remember to keep your eyes open.

"GODFREY."

It is principally from Drysdale's journal that I have drawn the story of those eventful days.

PART III

THE AFFAIR OF THE NECKLACE



CHAPTER I

The Delroys

ALTHOUGH Richard Delroy was known among his more familiar associates as Dickie, he was not, as that diminutive might seem to indicate, merely a good fellow and man about town. It is true that his wealth was great, and that he had never settled down to that steady struggle for money which had marked his father's career, and which many persons seem to think the only fitting employment for a man in his position. He had concluded, wisely perhaps, that he had enough, and thereupon proceeded to an intelligent enjoyment of it.

He had an office in the Wall Street district, where he spent some hours daily in interested contemplation of the world's markets and pregnant talks with investors, promoters, and beggars of various denominations. He had a fondness for books and art, finer and deeper than a mere mania for purchasing rare editions and unique masterpieces; he was a member of the Citizens' Union and contributed freely to every effort to suppress political graft and corruption; he was vice-chairman of the University Settlement Society, and belonged to many other politico-evangelical organisations. He had built two or three model tenements, after that voyage of discovery among the slums of London, which had also resulted, as we have seen, in his meeting the woman who became his wife.

Among these varied occupations, he managed to pass his time pleasantly and at the same time not unprofitably. In a word, if he did nothing very good, neither did he do anything very bad—indeed, he averaged up considerably better than most men of his class—and it may be added, as a positive virtue, that he had married for love and continued to regard his wife with an affection somewhat unusual in its intensity.

A great many people wondered why he had married Edith Croydon, but they were mostly those who had never met her. She would be called attractive rather than beautiful, with a quiet charm of manner which was felt most intensely in the privacy of her own home. She was quite the opposite of vivacious, yet there was about her no appearance of sadness, and her smile, when it came, was the sweeter and more welcome because long delayed. She gave one a certain sense of valuing it, of not wasting it. Certainly, she succeeded in making her husband an entirely happy man, which is, perhaps, the highest praise that can be given a wife. It is almost needless to add that she thoroughly sympathised with him in his experiments for the betterment of the condition of the poor, and that her marriage had not interfered with her own active work in the same direction.

Her sister was cast in a different mould. Her beauty won an instant appreciation. Six years younger than Mrs. Delroy, Miss Croydon was of that striking, decisive type of brunette which takes a man's heart by storm. One would never think of her as anything but daring and self-reliant—audacious, even—ready for any emergency and willing to meet it

squarely, open-eyed. A man, looking at her, would feel rising in his breast not that instinct of protection which most women awaken, but rather that instinct of the conqueror which is, perhaps, our heritage from the Vikings.

It was to Richard Delroy that Tremaine had applied for assistance in promoting the Martinique railroad. How he gained an introduction, I do not know—perhaps from some uncritical man in the Street; but gain it he did, and he used the opportunity to good advantage. I can easily imagine the perfection of wizardry he brought to bear upon Delroy—the persuasive eloquence, the irresistible fascination. In the end, he succeeded not only in persuading Delroy of the perfect feasibility of the scheme, but in gaining admission to Delroy's family.

It had been achieved in this wise:

They were discussing the railroad enterprise one afternoon, and finally the talk wandered to art and then to music. Delroy was delighted to find his companion a connoisseur of delicate perception and apparently wide experience.

"I suppose you've been attending the opera?" he inquired, finally.

"Oh, certainly; always when there is something I care especially to hear."

"De Reszke and Melba are on to-night."

"I intend to be there," said Tremaine instantly, no doubt guessing at what would follow.

"Then come up to our box," said Delroy. "We'll be glad to have you."

"I shall be very glad to come."

The words were spoken evenly, quietly, without any indication of that deep burst of triumph which glowed within him; for it was a triumph—a veritable one—one for which many men and most women would have made any sacrifice. He controlled himself admirably, too, at the opera and it was not until the end of the second act that he sought the box. He entered quietly and the introductions were accomplished in a moment. Besides Delroy and his wife, Miss Croydon and Drysdale were present. Their reception of him, it must be added, was somewhat icy, but this he did not seem to notice.

It was not to be denied that he added greatly to the life of the party; his comment was so apt, so brilliant, so illuminating, yet not in the least self-assured. Drysdale fell under the spell at once, and even the women, who naturally looked somewhat askance at the intruder—who, indeed, had greeted him with glances almost of repugnance—in the end yielded to it.

During a pause in the conversation, Delroy's glance happened to fall upon the superb necklace of pearls which encircled his wife's throat.

"Why, see there, Edith," he cried, "how those pearls have changed. They seem absolutely lifeless."

Mrs. Delroy picked up a strand with trembling fingers and looked at it.

"So they do," she agreed, a little hoarsely. "That's queer. They've changed since I put them on."

"There's a superstition, you know," remarked Drysdale, "that pearls somehow possess an acute sympathy with their owner. When some disaster is about to happen, they grow dull, just as these have done."

"Oh, nonsense, Jack!" protested Delroy. "Stop your croaking. Do you want to frighten Edith?"

"I'm not so easily frightened," said Mrs. Delroy, smiling at her husband, though Drysdale fancied she had grown a little pale, and bit his tongue for his thoughtless remark.

"Fortunately," said Tremaine suavely, "the defect is one which is very easily remedied. A few days' bath in salt water will restore their brilliancy."

"Well," asked Delroy, in some amusement, "where did you run across that bit of information?"

Tremaine laughed.

"I'm almost ashamed to tell. I got it first in a newspaper story about the Empress of Austria. She had a necklace of pearls that turned dull, and she sent them down to the Mediterranean to be immersed."

"What made them turn dull?" Drysdale inquired.

"No one knew," answered Tremaine with seeming carelessness. "It was just before the Empress was assassinated."

A moment's painful silence followed the words.

"It may have been only a newspaper yarn," said Delroy, at last. "We've outgrown the superstitions of the Middle Ages."

"Very possibly," assented Tremaine; "still it might be worth asking some jeweller about. Mrs. Delroy's necklace is worth saving," and he examined it with the glance of a connoisseur.

It invited examination, for it was almost unique in its perfection. It had been Delroy's one great extravagance. He had spent many years collecting the stones, which were of a beautiful iridescence and per-

fectly matched, and they had formed his wedding gift to his wife. The value of the separate stones was not less than a hundred thousand dollars; their value combined in the necklace could be only a matter of conjecture.

"Yes," agreed Drysdale, with a little laugh, "it certainly is. You'd better take it wn to Tiffany, Dickie."

"I will," said Delroy. "And don't think anything more about it, Edith."

"I won't," she answered, still smiling, her eyes unnaturally bright. "But it's very close in here; I should like a glass of water."

The water was procured in a moment. Drysdale, blaming himself more and more, was relieved to see her colour return. She soon seemed quite herself again; the talk turned to other things. And once again Tremaine showed his perfect self-control—he did not linger unduly, he did not give them a chance to grow accustomed to him, much less to grow tired of him. He had not the faintest air of being an intruder; he seemed completely at home; and when he left the box, the men, at least, were sorry he had gone, and said so. He was that wholly admirable thing—a guest whose departure one watches with regret.

That box party was the wedge which enabled Tremaine to enter the Delroy circle; a privilege which he cultivated with such consummate tact that he was soon accepted everywhere at his face value. His success was assured from the start, for he brought to palates jaded by over-feeding a new and exquisite tang; he

was fresh and unusual, amid a surfeit of stale and commonplace—he was relished to the uttermost.

It appeared, however, that the press of social duties and the trying spring weather were proving too much for Mrs. Delroy's strength, which was never great, and which had been especially taxed, this season, by the introduction of her sister to New York society. Even the comparative quiet of the Lenten season failed to restore her, and the resumption of the social whirl after Easter moved Delroy to protest.

"You're going it too hard, Edith," he remarked. "You need a rest and a change of air; so do I, though perhaps I don't look it. Suppose we go down to Edgemere for a week or two."

"Would you like to go?" she asked eagerly. "Thank you, dear. I do feel the need of it."

"Then I'll wire at once to Thomas to get the house ready. Shall we say next Saturday?"

"That will do nicely."

"I suppose we'd better have Jack down to look after Grace?"

"By all means—and you'd better have a friend or two—I don't want you to get bored."

"Oh, I shan't get bored—besides, I can run into town occasionally. But perhaps I *will* invite two or three of the fellows down for a few days. I'll think about it," and he hurried away to set the preparations astir.

It was not till the evening before their departure that he referred to the matter again.

"Jack's coming with us," he said, "and, by the way, Edith, I've asked Tremaine to come down to-morrow

and stay the week. I want to perfect our plans for that railroad project; and, besides, he's about the most fascinating fellow I ever met."

"Yes," she agreed, with a strained little laugh, "he's very fascinating."

CHAPTER II

The Gauntlet

EDGEMERE was a beautiful estate overlooking Great South Bay, just east of Babylon. Across the waters of the bay, the low dunes of Fire Island were visible, with the lighthouse pointing upward its white finger of warning. To east and west low, wooded islets closed in the horizon, while to the north, the tall trees of a broad stretch of woodland looked down upon the house. A pretty boathouse and pier adorned the beach and there was every other device of bowling-alley, gymnasium, tennis-court, and what not that could add to the amusement of summer sojourners. There were many pretty walks among the trees, many fragrant nooks where nature's sway had not been disputed; but perhaps the most attractive corner of the place was the walk beyond the bowling-alley, beneath a graceful pergola, covered with vines in summer, leading to a shady bower commanding a wide view of the bay, from which a terraced walk descended to the water.

It was essentially a summer play-house, and yet John Drysdale, looking through the blurred glass of the carriage that had brought him from the station through the sudden April shower, saw in the light streaming redly from the windows a warmth of welcome that summer could not show. A pile of logs was blazing

in the hall fire-place, but he paused only for a moment to get off the outdoor chill, and then ran up to his room to dress for dinner. He knew the customs of the house and he hoped for a reward if he dressed promptly.

Nor was he disappointed, for when he came down the stair some fifteen minutes later, he saw standing before the fire a regal figure. He paused a moment to contemplate it—the white shoulders rising from a gown of rich, dark red, the poise of the head with its black coiffure, the grace of the arm hanging idly by her side . . .

She was gazing intently into the fire, deep in thought, and for an instant she did not hear him. Then she turned with that rare smile which a woman of ardent temperament gives to only one man in the world.

"I heard you drive up," she said; "I thought you might remember our old habit."

"As if I could forget it! Do you know," and he held her at arm's length to look at her, "you take my breath away. But then, you always do. My luck seems too completely, supremely perfect to be true."

Her colour deepened a little under his gaze, but her eyes did not waver.

"I don't want you to live in a state of perpetual breathlessness," she said.

"Oh, you don't know what a delightful state it is. There's nothing in *my* appearance to cause palpitation of the heart. Just a moment ago, when I came to the turn of the stair and looked down and saw you standing here, do you know I was appalled at the

sheer wonder of the thing. 'She is mine,' I said to myself, 'She is mine,' and yet I couldn't quite believe it—it seemed too stupendous, too utterly absurd. What have I done to deserve you?"

There was something very touching in the sincerity of the frank, boyish face. She answered with a pressure of the hand which said more than many words.

"I feel a good deal as that page felt," he went on, after a moment, "who looked up at Kate the Queen. 'She never could be wronged, be poor,' he sighed, 'need him to help her.'"

"And yet in the end she did need him, didn't she? Perhaps," and her face changed and she looked away into the fire again, "perhaps I may need you—may have to ask a great sacrifice of you——"

"Ask it," he said eagerly. "Ask anything but that I give you up."

"I have already asked one thing," she said slowly, looking at him with a face very gentle. "No little thing—your trust—your confidence, your——"

"You had no need to ask it," and he caught her hands again. "It was yours already."

"And will be mine always?"

"Can you doubt it?"

"No—and I shall be glad to remember it."

"Not long ago," he said, looking at her, "a friend of mine gave me some good advice."

"Which was?"

"That I be happy in having you, without conditions; that I try to live up to you and be worthy of you; that I try to do something worth while for your sake."

She had listened with raised brows.

"I didn't know I was a subject of discussion——"

"You're not—but you sent me to him——"

"Oh—Mr. Godfrey!" A little cloud came upon her face; she opened her lips to say something more, but a step sounded on the stair and Tremaine came slowly down. There was a look on his face not pleasant to see, but he had banished all trace of it as he came forward to greet them.

When the men joined the women after dinner, they found Miss Croydon sitting at the piano idly touching the keys. Tremaine went to her with a directness that argued purpose. She looked up, expecting perhaps to see Drysdale; her eyes narrowed and hardened as they met Tremaine's.

"I've been wanting to ask you to sing," he said, apparently not noticing her change of expression, "but feared you might think me bold. You see, I am taking the bull by the horns. Some instinct told me——"

"The instinct is wrong," she interrupted, dropping her eyes to the keyboard. "I do not sing."

"No? Then I shall miss a great pleasure which I had promised myself. You have a singing voice."

There was a penetrating fascination about the man which compelled her to lift her eyes to his. He was smiling, radiant, triumphant, as a general, confident of victory, just swinging into battle. She shivered slightly, as he bent closer and added something in a tone of voice too low to be heard by the others in the room.

She flushed and her fingers crashed out an indignant chord of protest. Drysdale, drawn by some compelling uneasiness, approached them. Tremaine had been turning over the music as he talked; his ears, sensitive as a cat's, caught the sound of Drysdale's footsteps.

"Shall we try this one?" he asked aloud, and placed a sheet on the rack before her.

Without answering, she swept into the prelude.

> "'You'll love me yet!—and I can tarry
> Your love's protracted growing;
> June reared that bunch of flowers you carry
> From seeds of April's sowing.'" . . .

His voice was an admirable tenor, and he sang the lines with a meaning and expression that brought the warm blood to her cheek. When it was done, he acknowledged the applause with a little bow, casting at Drysdale a glance at once triumphant and ironic. And in that instant, Drysdale knew that the song had not been chosen by chance—that Tremaine had paused to listen at the stair-head. A sudden abyss yawned before him—here was a rival who would pause at nothing; who already had about him a certain air of victory. Drysdale clenched his teeth with a quick breath; well, he would make the fight of his life to keep what he had won!

"More, more!" clamoured Delroy. "You could make your fortune as a stage lover, Tremaine."

"Ah, there is a difference between the sham and the true!" said Tremaine, in a tone full of meaning. "You are an excellent accompanist, Miss Croydon;

you know how to humour the singer, and I need a lot of humouring."

"Will you give them an encore?" she asked, disregarding the compliment.

"Let me see." He was looking at her with eyes wonderfully bright. "There is a simple little melody they sing at St. Pierre at the time of the Carnival. I think you could accompany it," and he hummed the air. "Splendid! That is it. You will think the words pretty. I'll sing them as they were written, not as the Creoles have changed them.

"'Petits amoureux aux plumes,
  Enfants d'un brillant séjour,
Vous ignorez l'amertume,
  Vous parlez souvent d'amour;
Vous méprisez la dorure,
  Les salons, et les bijoux;
Vous chérissez la Nature,
  Petits oiseaux, becquetez-vous!'"

"Go on, go on; don't stop!" cried Delroy. "There must be another verse. It wouldn't be a French song if there wasn't."

"There is," and Tremaine laughed; "as usual, one that points a moral. I hadn't intended to sing it—but—with your permission, Miss Croydon."

She nodded, as she ran lightly through a little improvised interlude. Drysdale, from the other end of the piano, wondered how Delroy could suddenly develop such poor taste. Tremaine glanced at him, as he began the second verse; then he turned his eyes upon Miss Croydon, smiling.

"'Voyez là bas, dans cette église,
Auprès d'un confessional,
Le prêtre, qui veut faire croire à Lise,
Qu'un baiser est un grand mal;
Pour prouver à la mignonne
Qu'un baiser bien fait, bien doux,
N'a jamais damné personne,
Petits oiseaux, becquetez-vous!'"

"Capital!" cried Delroy. "What next? Come—the third verse!"

But Miss Croydon rose abruptly from the piano.

"No," she said; "I protest. I've no doubt it goes from bad to worse! I'm afraid to listen!"

"You are wrong, Miss Croydon," said Tremaine, smiling full into her eyes. "You do me an injustice. I assure you there is no third verse," and he joined the Delroys where they sat before the fire.

CHAPTER III

A Crossing of Swords

WHEN Drysdale opened his window next morning, he found the sun shining from a sky unclouded and the air warm with the promise of spring. It called him in a way not to be resisted and he stepped out on the little balcony which ran beneath the window; then he caught the odour of a cigarette, and turned to see Tremaine smiling at him.

"Good-morning!" cried Tremaine. "A beautiful morning, isn't it? Won't you join me?"

It was impossible to refuse him; but Drysdale had no thought of refusal—he rather welcomed the opportunity to cross swords with his rival, to test his skill, to find out in how far that air of triumph was justified by the strength behind it. So he took the little cylinder of paper as he returned the greeting and sat down on the sill of his window.

"But how grey the sea is," continued Tremaine. "It is not so in the tropics—it is blue—oh, such a blue!"

"You seem to be an early riser," observed Drysdale, who had thought to find himself the first astir.

"It is a habit one learns at St. Pierre. The dawn is, there, the only pleasant portion of the day—one rises to burn incense to it."

"You have lived long at St. Pierre?"

"Nearly four years."

"And before that?"

Drysdale felt the baldness of the question, and knew that he was not proceeding as deftly as he should, that he was fencing clumsily; but opposed to this was a burning desire to know more about this man, to probe into his past. Not by the quiver of a lash did Tremaine indicate that he found the question either strange or unwelcome.

"Ah, I have been a wanderer," he answered readily, and with apparent frankness. "I have lived in many countries and I have met many people—at Paris, at St. Petersburg, at London, even at Stamboul. And you, Mr. Drysdale?"

There was something subtly ironic in the tone—a shade of veiled contempt—that brought a flush to the other's face.

"Yes, you have guessed it," he said; "I've lived only in New York."

The merest flicker of amusement flashed across Tremaine's lips and they finished their cigarettes in silence. Tremaine's suavity seemed to have come suddenly to an end. He no longer attempted to disregard the barrier that had arisen between them, or explain away that swift glance of the night before. They went down together to breakfast, presently; but only Delroy joined them there, and it was not an especially pleasant meal, despite the bright sun at the windows and Tremaine's imperturbable good humour. As they arose from table, that gentleman announced his intention of going for a walk about the grounds, and Drysdale carried Delroy off to the library.

"Now, Dickie," he began resolutely, as soon as they were seated, "I'm going to quarrel with you. You're not careful enough of your family. Who is this Tremaine, anyway?"

Delroy regarded the questioner with a long stare of astonishment.

"Why, he's a mighty pleasant fellow who's putting through——"

"I know all that," interrupted the other, a little rudely. "But who *is* he? Where did he come from?"

"He came from St. Pierre——"

"Dickie," said Drysdale impressively, "you're too easy. You think all men are honest. Have you seen his credentials? Who stands for him?"

Delroy jumped up impatiently.

"See here, Jack," he demanded, "what is it you're driving at?"

"I'm trying to point out to you that you've taken Tremaine to your bosom a little too hastily," answered Drysdale bluntly.

Delroy flushed with annoyance.

"Mr. Tremaine," he [illegible] emphasis, "is one of the most cultured and [illegible] I ever met. He came to me on a matter of business. I found that we had many tastes in common, and I have enjoyed his society immensely."

"That's all right, Dickie. I've no objection to your entertaining [illegible] you like. But you oughtn't to bring him here."

"Why?" demanded Delroy.

"Because [illegible] he's making

love to Grace. Didn't you see him last night at the piano, when——"

Delroy, who had been listening open-mouthed, burst into a sudden roar of laughter. Drysdale stopped, looked at him, then turned and left the room.

Tremaine seemed to enjoy his walk; at least, he did not return to the house unt[illegible] the hour for luncheon. At that meal, the w[illegible]n joined them, and a drive was planned for the afternoon, which ended at the vesper service at the little chapel at Babylon. For some reason, the drive had not been a success; a certain constraint seemed to have fallen upon the party, a feeling of unrest, of uneasiness, which sent them severally to their r[illegible]s soon as they reached the house.

Drysdale did not proceed to dress immediately. Instead, he sat [illegible] out into the darkness. He could se[illegible] the [illegible] light which streamed from his [illegible]r's windows—what was there about him that repelled while it [illegible]? What had he meant by that glance of [illegible] Drysdale flushed hotly at the [illegible] It had [illegible] so elusive, that at [illegible] its full meaning, it [illegible] triumph. [illegible]? And was there [illegible] that? Did that explain Grace's indifference [illegible] Was that [illegible] he sat beside her [illegible] Was he thinking of Tremaine [illegible] him before the fire.

He sprang to his feet [illegible] on the lights, and began [illegible]

What instinct was it that told him to set his foot lightly on the stair, or was it only that he hoped to look down upon her for a moment, unseen? The sound of voices reached him, and leaning over, he saw two figures standing before the fire which the evening chill had rendered necessary—Miss Croydon and Tremaine. He started abruptly to descend, when he caught a sentence that made him pause.

"I'm not in the least like that," Tremaine was saying, and though the voice was carefully repressed, it had in it a ring of savage earnestness. "In your heart you know it, or you wouldn't stand there listening. I have come to you at once, boldly, because I'm sure that I shall win. He is not worthy of you—in your heart you know that, also. He cannot hold you, he is too weak; I shall wrench you away! You're not the woman to be tied to a gilded mediocrity. You have fire—ah! I have studied you—you need a larger outlook upon life. You've been kept in a cage—you've never had a chance to be yourself. Here, you will never have the chance—with me, it would be different. You do not know how different! At Paris, at Vienna, at Rome—"

She had been leaning away from him, staring into the fire, as though charmed into silence by this impetuous eloquence. Now, she stood erect and looked at him.

"What you are proposing to me is infamous," she said, through clenched teeth.

"It is not in the least infamous," he retorted coolly. "I am offering you the future I know you sigh for. It is a future that I sigh for, too; that I have sighed

for from the first moment I saw you, and which I am going to make come true. Together, we will conquer the world. As my wife——"

"Your wife?" There was scorn, anger, fear in the words, and in the glance she cast at him.

"Certainly—my wife," he repeated, with emphasis. "If I should prove to you——"

She stopped him by an imperative gesture.

"You go too far," she said. "There is a limit to what even I will endure. Do not push me too far; do not rely too much upon my forbearance. A man capable of any crime——"

He held her by the motion of a finger.

"Is a man who appeals to you," he concluded. "To be capable of any crime, and yet to commit none, is a virtue——"

"To commit none!" she echoed scornfully.

He looked at her without the flicker of a lash.

"To commit none, yes—your own conscience acquits me," he repeated steadily. "But I would pause at none to gain possession of you. Look at me—do you doubt it?"

She looked at him with a little shiver.

"No," she said.

"Is there any other man you know who can say as much?"

She wrested her eyes away from his and turned again to the fire.

"You strangely mistake me," she said in a cold voice. "You are reading your own nature into mine. I would ask no man to commit a crime for my sake. I should abhor the man who did."

He did not answer, but stood looking at her with a gaze which seemed to envelop her, to pierce her through and through. Drysdale felt the perspiration start across his forehead; he wished to cry out, but could not . . .

A door at the farther end of the hall opened and Delroy came in. The bonds loosened and Drysdale fled back to his room. He needed to compose himself.

Mrs. Delroy did not come down to dinner, pleading a headache, and after the meal was over, Delroy carried Tremaine off to the library for a last talk over the details of the railroad enterprise. They intended going into New York in the morning for an interview with certain capitalists that would be crucial, and they needed to arrange their plan of attack.

Drysdale, left to himself, threw away his cigar and went straightway to seek Grace Crosslon. He found her sitting before the fire in the hall, gazing into it, her head in her hands. She did not hear his approach, and for a moment, as he gazed down at her, he doubted whether he had really witnessed that strange interview of an hour before. Had he not rather dreamed it? Was it only a wild imagining? He passed his hand before his eyes and dropped into the chair beside her.

She started at the sound, turned, saw him, and smiled. But it was not the smile that had greeted him the night before; it was not from the heart; it did not reveal it dismembled. He saw the change and trembled as he guessed its meaning. Then he put hesitation behind him.

"Grace," he said gently, "as I was coming down to dinner to-night, I happened to see you and Tremaine standing here together, and, without intending to, I overheard a sentence which stopped me up there at the turn of the stair."

She looked at him, her eyes dark with apprehension.

"You mean that you listened?" she asked.

"After that first sentence, it seemed to me that I had a right to listen."

Her lips were curling in scorn, her eyes were burning through him.

"Oh, a right!"

"Yes, a right," he repeated boldly. "No man should be permitted to talk to you as he talked. Why, he insulted you, he threatened you—Heaven knows what outrage he was ready to commit. Why did you permit it?"

She turned away from him and her arms dropped wearily by her sides.

"Your proper course is to inform Delroy," he continued doggedly, braving the certainty of offending her. "Or, better still, I will, and then kick that scoundrel out. I've already had one quarrel with Dickie about him."

"Have you?" she asked listlessly.

"Yes, I distrust him. Why did you permit him to talk to you the way he did?"

"I can't tell you," she answered hearsely.

"But I have a right to know."

"Yes, I suppose you have. Why not break it off? Then you won't need to worry about me any more."

He started from his chair at the words, but controlled himself and sat down again.

"Do you mean that you want to break it off?" he demanded, in a quivering voice. "Do you mean that you can possibly care for that——"

She turned upon him with blazing eyes.

"Do you insult me, too?"

For an instant he sat motionless as stone; then he fell at her knees and caught her hands and covered them with kisses.

"Forgive me!" he cried. "Forgive me! It was unworthy. But, oh, Grace, give me a word—just a word—tell me——"

"Listen," she said, bending over him, instantly moved, instantly tender; "you told me last night that you trusted me."

"I do with my whole soul."

"And Kate the Queen needs you, as she said she would. Only I must have time to think; to straighten out the tangle. To-morrow I will tell you—to-morrow night—till then——"

He seized her and drew her down to him and kissed her on the lips.

"I've never doubted you," he said. "And I'll fight the battle of my life before I give you up."

At the farther end of the hall, a door closed very, very softly.

CHAPTER IV

Cut and Thrust

JOHN DRYSDALE accompanied the other men to town in the morning, not that he cared to be with either of them, for his indignation at what he considered Delroy's laxness had not in the least diminished, and his distrust of Tremaine had grown stronger with the passing hours; but the prospect of a day alone in the house was intolerable, and he felt that Grace Croydon would wish to avoid him till the hour of explanation was at hand.

Indeed, the sudden antagonism he had developed toward Delroy would have suggested a permanent return to town had not a point of honour, as it were, compelled him to stay. He could not, at this moment, desert Grace Croydon to the machinations of Tremaine; he must save her if he could, not only for his own sake, but for hers.

It was this gloomy meditation which occupied him on the trip in to the city, for his companions, immersed in the details of the day's business, left him severely to himself. He bade them good-bye at the ferry, and, in a sort of desperation, went down to the *Record* office and asked for Godfrey. He felt that he was being swept into waters beyond his depth, that he needed a strong, cool hand to pluck him back to safety; but he found that Godfrey was out of town.

Delroy and Tremaine went at once to the Wall Street office where the conference concerning the railroad was to take place. Memories of that conference still survive in the Street; wild legends concerning it — how a company of conservative, cold-blooded, steel-gutted capitalists were worked upon, bamboozled, hypnotised, wrought up to enthusiasm over a project which was proved, by the subsequent reports of engineers, to be about as practicable as a bridge to the moon. Even yet, the glamour of that meeting endures with some of the investors who were present, and they are still convinced that a railroad in Martinique would pay a fabulous return. Tremaine set for the Street a new standard of "smoothness," and one which has never been approached.

The conference was over by noon, and Tremaine announced his intention of returning to Edgemere by the first train.

"I'm feeling a little worn out by the morning's exertions," he explained, and he really looked it. "When are you coming out?"

"I'm going up to Tiffany's first," Delroy answered, "and have a talk with them about my wife's necklace. I left it with them Saturday. If they advise a sea-bath, I'll bring it along with me, and we'll see what virtue there is in the treatment."

"Perhaps there isn't any," said Tremaine; "or it may be that Tiffany has some better method."

"Well, I'll know by to-night," and Delroy held up a beckoning finger to a passing cab. "Good-bye till then."

When Tremaine reached Edgemere, he made a tour

of the hall, library, billiard-room, but finding them deserted, at last went slowly up to his own room and remained there for an hour or more. Then he came down and spent the remainder of the afternoon walking thoughtfully about the grounds, smoking innumerable cigarettes. If the object of his early return was another interview with Miss Croydon, as one would naturally suppose, he was disappointed in it, for she, knowing perhaps that he had come back alone, did not leave her apartments.

Delroy and Drysdale returned together on the five-o'clock train, and hurried into the house. They found Tremaine lounging in a great chair in the hall, and if the glance which Drysdale shot at him was electric with suspicion, he had at least self-control enough to restrain any ill-considered or hasty words. But he blamed himself bitterly for not having foreseen the possibility of Tremaine's early return, the reason for which he guessed at once.

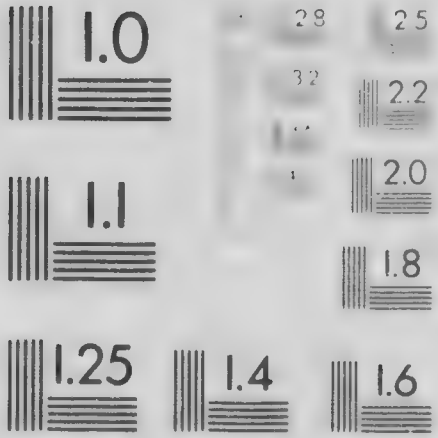
"We've just time to make the arrangements before dinner," said Delroy, and he held up a long morocco case.

"Ah," and Tremaine rose lazily, "so you've brought it? Tiffany advises it, then?"

"Yes—but come into the library and you shall hear. Thomas, ask Mrs. Delroy and Miss Croydon if they will come down to the library for a moment. I want to get the stones in the water at once."

Drysdale, looking at Tremaine, thought he perceived a sudden flash of triumph in his face, but it was instantly repressed and may have been only fancy. The women joined them in the library almost im-

MICROCOPY RESOLUTION TEST CHART



mediately. Delroy unwrapped a bundle and laid it on the table. It was a little cage of fine but exceedingly strong gilt wire, closely meshed.

"My dear," he began, turning to his wife, "you know I took your necklace to Tiffany's just before we came out here, and left it for them to examine. They seemed rather puzzled by its condition—rather sceptical about its having changed so suddenly—and they asked me to leave it until to-day. When I went back after it, their expert gave me a long lecture about the action of fatty acids and the danger of leaving pearls shut up in air-tight safe-deposit boxes. I assured him that these hadn't been shut up—they haven't, have they, Edith?"

"No, of course not," answered his wife promptly.

"I thought not, but I doubt if he fully believed me. Finally he said that in a case so unusual as this, it would be well to try the sea-water treatment before proceeding to anything more heroic—peeling, for instance."

"Not very encouraging," remarked Drysdale.

"Oh, I didn't stop there. I drove from Tiffany's up to that queer little Italian jewel-store—Contiani's—on Thirty-third Street. Contiani himself was there and he grew quite excited when he saw the stones and heard the story. He said that a sea-bath was unquestionably the best thing for them—in fact, he advised it most strongly. The stones are getting deader and deader, so to speak."

He took up the case from the table and snapped it open. The necklace lay before them, a dull, clammy white.

"So it seems that the only thing to be done is to immerse them in their native element for a few days," he continued; "and the sooner it's done the better, Contiani says. That's what I brought this cage for. We'll put the necklace in it and let it down into the water at the end of the pier."

"It seems a rather dangerous thing to do," objected Drysdale. "Why not have a lot of water brought up to the house and immerse them here?"

"Because only living sea water will do; it seems to have no efficacy shut up in a vessel of any kind. I asked about that particularly. Besides, I don't see that there'll be any danger—we're the only ones who know. Still, if Edith objects——"

"Oh, not at all," said Mrs. Delroy instantly. "I only hope the stones will be restored; I think they're horrid now," and she shivered a little as she looked at them.

"I would suggest, nevertheless," put in Tremaine, "that a guard be stationed at the pier, to prevent any possibility of danger. If you haven't any servants you can fully trust, we might ourselves take turn about."

"Nonsense!" protested Delroy quickly. "Do you think I'd impose on you like that?"

"I think Mr. Tremaine's suggestion a good one, nevertheless," said Miss Croydon. "A guard could stay in the boathouse for a few days without any great discomfort."

"Perhaps you're right," and Delroy nodded "Graham and his boy will be just the ones. They can relieve each other, so that the time won't seem so long."

"Yes," agreed Dryslade, "the Grahams are all right."

Delroy touched the bell.

"Send someone after Graham and his boy, Thomas," he said. "Bring them here at once."

"You're quite certain of them," asked Fremane. "It's rather a big temptation to put in any man's way."

Delroy laughed.

"Certain! I should say so. He was an old servant of my father's, and would as soon think of robbing himself as robbing us. His son's a chip of the old block. But here they are," he added, as the door opened and two men came in.

A single glance was enough to convince anyone of their absolute probity. The elder man was perhaps sixty years of age, in the very prime of health and strength, with a weather-beaten countenance surrounded by a grizzled beard; the younger one was about twenty-five. Both showed the clean skin and clear eyes and firm muscles resulting from life in the open air, for they had the care of the acres of lawn and garden and woodland and meadow belonging to the estate.

"We was jest passin', sir," began Graham, "when Tummas called us an' said as how you wanted to see us."

"Yes," said Delroy, and held up the little cage. "Do you know what this is?"

Graham looked at it stolidly.

"No, sir; I don't," he said.

"Well, I'll show you. [illegible] of white stones

is Mrs. Delroy's pearl necklace, worth something over a hundred thousand dollars. I put them in this cage, close the lid, and fasten it with these little hooks. Now, Graham, these stones have lost their lustre and sea-water's the only thing that will restore it. I want you to tie a rope to this cage and lower it into the bay from the end of the pier, securing it, of course, so that it can't thresh around or break away. It will have to stay there for three or four days, and during that time I'd like you and your boy to sleep at the boat-house and see that nobody meddles with it."

The two men had listened intently, with serious faces.

"Very well, sir," said the elder, as Delroy finished, and held out his hand for the cage.

Delroy gave it to him, with a little chuckle of enjoyment.

"You'd better have a gun with you—not that I think there's any danger—"

"Never fear, sir," interrupted Graham. "We'll 'tend t' all that. Come on, William."

Delroy watched them till the door closed behind them.

"I believe Graham would say 'Very well, sir,' in just that tone, if I told him to burn the house down," he remarked. "We'll go down after dinner and [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] And now," he added, "my [illegible] are beginning to clamour vigorously for refreshment."

Drysdale lost no time in staring out of the window or in unprofitable meditation, for he was determined that [illegible] should have [illegible] opportunity for

a tête-à-tête with Grace Croydon. Therefore he dressed as rapidly as he could and ran lightly down the stair. But there was no one waiting for him before the fire-place.

He sat down in one of the great chairs, hoping against hope. Perhaps she would come; every moment of silence irked him; he was chafing to tear down the wall of misunderstanding that had risen between them. How could she have permitted Tremaine's threatening insolence? She was the last woman in the world . . .

"I think we're going to have rain," said a smooth voice, and Drysdale looked up with a start to find Tremaine standing beside him.

Since the night before they had made no pretence of friendship; they instinctively understood each other; and Tremaine's smile now had a cool impudence very galling. Nevertheless, Drysdale choked back his first angry impulse; he must wait until Grace spoke.

"Do you?" he said carelessly, and turned deliberately away.

Tremaine's face flushed at the tone and his eyes narrowed like a cat's; then he, too, sat down and stretched out his legs.

"It's a great privilege," he said, "to be admitted thus to a place where life passes so pleasantly."

"It is," agreed Drysdale. "I confess, I don't understand how you obtained it."

He regretted the words the instant they were spoken; he had no wish to precipitate a quarrel.

Tremaine did not change his careless attitude, but

he turned upon his companion a gaze that glittered coldly.

"I must tell you," he said in a voice of steel, "that you have not the manners of a gentleman."

The words brought Drysdale upright.

"Perhaps not," he retorted hotly; "but neither have I those of a blackguard. I had the good fortune to overhear the infamous threats you made to Miss Croydon——"

Tremaine laughed a laugh that was more insulting than any words.

"So you're also an eavesdropper, a listener at doors? That confirms the statement I have already made. You will make me an apology or——"

"Or what?" demanded Drysdale fiercely, rising from his chair with muscles tense.

Tremaine rose, too, deliberately, and faced him with a look so terrible that despite himself he shivered.

"Or take the consequences," said Tremaine, in a tone all the more threatening because it was very calm.

Drysdale laughed—it cost him something, but he achieved it.

"Very well," he said contemptuously, "I'll take the consequences," and he turned his back upon Tremaine and walked away with an indifference he was very far from feeling.

CHAPTER V

The Blow Falls

DINNER, that night, was anything but a cheerful meal; in fact, it was evident that the house party possessed that fatal bar to success—a spirit of antagonism. Drysdale and Grace Croydon maintained a careful silence, and Mrs. Delroy was so obviously depressed that her husband was alarmed.

"I don't believe this stay in the country is doing you a bit of good, Edith," he observed.

She smiled wearily in answer to his anxious look.

"I don't feel very well, to-night," she said. "I think I shall lie down right after dinner."

"I would," he agreed. "You must save yourself all you can. I can't have you getting ill, you know. If I'd had any sense, I'd have got you away from that New York whirl a month ago."

"I'm not going to be ill," she assured him; "I'll be all right in a day or two."

As soon as the meal was over, she and her sister disappeared upstairs while the men lighted their cigars and strolled down to the boathouse to view the preparations made by the Grahams for the protection of the necklace. The night was very close, with a promise of rain unmistakable.

They went through the boathouse without finding anyone, but out on the pier beyond old Graham was

sitting, gazing across the water and smoking an odoriferous pipe. Between his knees he held a Winchester repeater and a revolver-butt stuck from a case at his belt.

Delroy laughed quietly as he looked at him.

"Why, you're a regular arsenal," he said. "You're taking it in earnest for sure."

"Might as well be on th' safe side, sir," responded Graham sententiously.

"And where's the necklace?"

"Lowered from th' end of th' pier, sir."

"No chance of it getting away?"

"I tied th' knots, sir."

"All right—that settles it. You're not going to sit out here all night, I hope?"

"Willum takes his trick at midnight, sir. He's gone over t' th' house t' bring a cot an' some beddin' down t' th' boathouse. We'll take turn an' turn about."

"Well," said Delroy, turning away, "I see I can sleep without worrying any over the safety of the necklace. If there's anything you want, Graham, in the way of eatables or drinkables, don't hesitate to send to the butler for them."

"Thank 'ee, sir; but I guess we'll let th' drinkables alone fer th' present. We'll cook our own meals on th' stove in th' boathouse."

"What do you want to do that for?"

"Well," returned Graham slowly, "then we'll know that they am't nothin' in them thet hadn't ought t' be there."

Delroy laughed again, long and loud, and even Drysdale smiled.

"You've been reading a dime novel!" cried Delroy, when he had got his breath. "Deadwood Dick—I didn't think it of you, Graham!"

"I don't read nothin', sir, but th' Noo York *Record*——"

"It's the same thing," Delroy interjected.

"But I don't believe in takin' no risks—when you come after th' necklace, sir, it's a-goin' t' be right here."

"I haven't a doubt of it," his employer assured him. "It would be a mighty desperate thief who'd tackle you. You're all right, Graham. But I'd go into the boathouse if it rains."

"I'll see about it, sir," said Graham, and refilled his pipe.

As they passed through the boathouse again, they perceived young "Willum" busily engaged in making up his bed on a cot in one corner. Delroy nodded to him and passed on without speaking.

"It's too nice a night to spend in the house," said Drysdale, a little abruptly, as they mounted the steps to the door. "I believe I'll go for a tramp. I'll take my rain-coat, though; then I needn't hurry back."

"I didn't know you were such a lover of nature, Jack," observed Delroy.

"I'm not; but I feel like tramping to-night."

Delroy shrugged his shoulders, as Drysdale entered the outer hall with them and took down his rain-coat from the rack. Thomas, who was stationed in the vestibule, helped him on with it.

"Good-bye," he called from the door; "don't look for me for an hour or two."

"All right, we won't worry," answered Delroy;

"though, for my part," he added, as he and Tremaine went on through the hall together, "I prefer a book before the fire. There's a chill in the air that strikes through one after a while, and Jack 'll soon get enough of it. But I'd better go up and see how my wife's getting along. You'll excuse me."

"Certainly—and stay as long as you like. I'm going to my room presently, myself—I have some letters to write."

Delroy nodded and went on up the stair. Tremaine sank into one of the chairs before the fire and watched the blazing logs, with an expression intent, alert, as though he were waiting for someone.

A door opened and closed, a light step crossed the hall, a hand was laid upon the chair-back . . .

"Oh," said Miss Croydon, "I thought—where is Mr. Drysdale?"

Tremaine arose slowly.

"Drysdale," he said, with a meaning look which did not escape her, "was unable to resist the charms of the evening. He has gone for a walk. He said he would not be back for a couple of hours. Please sit down."

It was more of a command than an invitation, and she yielded to it reluctantly.

"I can stay but a moment," she said. "Edith is not at all well and needs me. Why are you waiting here?"

He pulled a chair close beside her.

"I was waiting for you," he said calmly. "I don't think you quite realise yet that I am in earnest."

"To be in earnest would be infamous."

"No indeed; not to be in earnest would be infamous. I'm paying you the greatest compliment I'm capable of paying any woman. I ask you to be my wife."

"Why keep up that mockery?" she demanded scornfully.

"It is not a mockery. The past is dead."

"It is not dead; you have brought it to life. It is becoming intolerable."

"I know it; therefore I offer to make it tolerable. I have no wish to persecute anyone."

"Then why do you?"

"Necessity ——"

"Oh, nonsense!"

"Listen," he said, with sudden intensity leaning toward her and looking in her eyes, "if I can prove to you that the past is really dead—dead past recall—dead past hope of resurrection—will you marry me?"

She looked at him without shrinking.

"No!" she answered.

"I see what it is," he said between his teeth: "it is not that I do not awaken an answering chord ... ou—I do—I can see it—we were set apart for each other. It is not that you do not long to break through this silly English cage which has always hedged ... about—I remember that you are really French in every drop of your blood. It is this pink-and-white nonentity who stands between us. You've fallen in love with his baby face—but it's not the love of a woman for a man, it's the love of a mother for her child. That other love you as yet know nothing of—but it shall be my part to teach it you—my privilege—my great mission—and I shall enjoy the fruits of it. Deep in

your heart you know that the pale feeling you have for this boy is not love—not strong, passionate, mature love—the love that seizes and conquers, that takes one through heaven and through hell. Not many women are capable of such a love—they're too cold, too selfish. But you're capable of it, and when it comes to you, as I swear it shall come, you'll not stop to question the past; you'll look only toward the future—you'll not stop to ask what the world thinks; you'll heed only the longings of your own heart."

She had sat spell-bound, gazing at him, chained by the sound of his voice, by his vehemence. She roused herself with an effort.

"If I should love," she said, "I should at least choose a gentleman——"

He interrupted with a dry laugh.

"There spoke the Philistine—the English variety! Your heart wasn't in it! Let me tell you that you wouldn't stop to ask what he was—he would be only the man you love. And have you chosen a gentleman? Does a gentleman listen at the turn of the stairs to a conversation not intended for him? He did listen; he told you of his ridiculous doubts of you. What right has he to doubt you, to make conditions, to demand explanations? Explanations from a woman like you!"

"He has a right——"

"He has no right—he's a beggar at your table! If he can't hold you, it's his fault, not yours. And he *can't* hold you—he's too weak every way! Ah, *I* could hold you!"

"Yes—perhaps even beat me!"

He looked at her, his eyes agleam.

"Perhaps," he agreed, his mouth working with eagerness. "Perhaps I should. But if I did, you would stab me in the night."

He was weaving the spell about her again; she gazed at him, half-fascinated.

"Yes," she said intensely; "yes—I should like to do it now!"

His eyes flashed with sudden triumph.

"And yet you think yourself in love with Drysdale!" he cried. "Did he ever awaken a wish like that in you?"

"No; thank God!" and she shivered slightly.

He was radiant, assured.

"Nor any other feeling except a baby liking! Yet you yield to his fancied right; you promise to explain to him! It was to do that you came here to-night——"

"Who told you that?"

"He did."

"Then why isn't he here?"

"He preferred to commune with nature," Tremaine answered, in an indescribable tone. "Think of any man preferring nature to you—preferring anything to you—life, honour—anything! Do you know what I'm longing to do? I'm longing to take you in my arms and hold you fast and kiss you on those red lips of yours—kiss you, kiss you——"

He was half out of his chair, leaning over her. Another instant—but his ears caught the opening of a door.

"Here comes Delroy," he said in another tone,

rising suddenly, his hands gripped tensely at his sides. "Damn him!"

She lay back in her chair, relaxed suddenly, panting with exhaustion.

"I'll go," he added hoarsely. "I can't keep up the farce of polite conversation—besides I have some letters to write. Good-night."

For an hour or more, Delroy sat alone before the fire reading. At last he yawned, laid down his book, arose, and walked to the door. The wind was rising; he could hear it roaring in the trees; and every minute a broad flash of lightning illumined the clouds on the horizon.

"There's a storm coming," he said to Thomas, who was nodding at his post. "I wonder where the devil Drysdale went? He'd better be getting in pretty soon."

As though in answer to the thought, a dark figure appeared suddenly on the walk, strode up the steps, and opened the door. It was Drysdale.

He took off his coat, threw it to Thomas, and went on into the inner hall, where he stood rubbing his hands before the fire, with a face so hopeless, fierce, despairing, that Delroy was fairly startled.

"You may go to bed, Thomas," he said; then he went to Drysdale and laid a hand upon his shoulder. "What's the matter, Jack?" he asked. "You're looking regularly done up."

Drysdale turned with a start.

"Oh, it's you, is it, Dickie? Where is Grace?"

"Upstairs with my wife."

"Where has she been this evening?"

"She's been down here talking with Tremaine most of the time—but I say—hold on—what ails the fellow?" he demanded, staring after the other as he bounded up the stairs. "Well, that beats me!"

He was still staring, when Tremaine appeared at the landing and came down, a packet of letters in his hand.

"I want to put these in the bag," he said, "so they'll get off by the early mail."

"It's on the rack out there," Delroy replied, and the other went past him into the outer hall. He was back in a moment.

"That's a good evening's work," he said, with a sigh of satisfaction. "But what's the matter? You look as though you'd seen a ghost."

"Drysdale came in just now looking as though *he'd* seen one, all nerves and raw flesh—and stalked upstairs as mad as a hornet about something."

"Ah," said Tremaine, with just the flicker of an eyelash, "and yet one would have thought that a walk through the silence of the night would calm his nerves. There comes the rain!"

There was a hiss, a flash, and a great crash of thunder split the firmament apart and shook the house to its foundations. They could hear the rain dashing in sheets against the windows.

"That's a storm for sure; listen to the wind. Drysdale got in just in time. But I never saw him like that before; something extraordinary must have happened to him. He's been out of humour for a day or two. I wonder, now, if he was caught in that steel crash?

By Jove, I did hear him say that he'd bought a block of stock on margin!"

A gleam of triumph indescribable flashed into Tremaine's eyes.

"That may explain it," he said, with studied carelessness.

"Yes—but it doesn't excuse it. If a man can't keep his temper when he loses, he hasn't any business to speculate. Hello, who's that?"

Someone was pounding at the outer door. Delroy strode to it and threw back the bolt. It flew open and young Graham staggered rather than walked into the hall, hatless, coatless, soaked with rain, his eyes staring, his face rigid with horror.

"Good God, man; what is it?" cried Delroy.

He opened his mouth; but only a low rumbling came from his throat.

"Come!" cried Delroy sharply. "Be a man! What is it?"

By a mighty effort, Graham pulled himself together.

"Father's killed!" he whispered hoarsely.

CHAPTER VI

The Mystery at the Pier

FOR a moment, no one spoke. Only the boy's laboured breathing broke the stillness; he was shivering convulsively, clutching at the hat-rack for support.

"It was the lightning, I suppose," said Tremaine, at last, in a suppressed voice. "I knew that bolt struck somewhere near. The pier would naturally be a dangerous place."

"I told him not to stay there," broke in Delroy angrily. "There was no sense in it. Was it the lightning?" he demanded, wheeling on the boy.

"No," he gasped, "it's murder."

"What!" cried Delroy incredulously.

"Lightnin' don't cave a man's head in, does it?" asked the boy doggedly.

Delroy grabbed a rain-coat from the rack and Tremaine caught up another. Across the lawn they sped, under the trees, down to the water front, with young Graham stumbling blindly along behind. The little white boathouse gleamed vivid in the glare of the lightning. They entered and paused uncertainly in the gloom.

"Where is he?" asked Delroy.

"Out there on th' pier,' answered Graham brokenly. "Out there where they struck him down."

"Get a light here and we'll bring him in. Come on, Tremaine."

At the pier-end lay a dark, huddled figure. A lightning-flash disclosed the staring eyes, the blood-stained face.

"Good God!" cried Delroy, and the horror of it seemed to strike through him, to palsy him.

Tremaine knelt down beside the body and lifted a limp wrist. He held it a moment, then laid it gently down.

"He's quite dead," he said, and stood quickly erect again, with a shudder he could not wholly repress.

Delroy, swallowing hard, gripped back his self-control.

"We can't leave him out here," he said; "perhaps there's a spark of life. You take the legs; I'll take the head."

It was a heavy load and they staggered under it. From the boathouse a light flashed out, and in a moment young Graham came hurrying out to them and helped them forward, sobbing drily.

They laid their burden on the cot which the son had occupied and stood for a moment looking down at it. The boy seemed on the verge of collapse; his lips were drawn, his teeth chattering; the horrible sobbing did not stop. Delroy turned to him sharply.

"William," he said, "I want you to show yourself a man. A good deal depends on you. Remember that—remember, too, that with your help, we're going to catch the scoundrel who did this."

The boy straightened up with a groan of agony.

"That's what I want!" he cried. "That's all I ask!"

"That's what we want, too," and Delroy laid a calming hand upon his arm. "Now go up to the house and rouse Thomas, but don't alarm anyone else. Get him to telephone at once to Babylon for Doctor Wise and for the coroner, and tell them both to get out here as quickly as they can. Do you understand?"

"Yes, sir," answered Graham, and disappeared in the outer darkness.

For some moments, the two men stood looking down at the body without speaking. Then Delroy stooped and touched lightly the bloody forehead.

"See," he said, "his head has been beaten in."

"Yes," nodded Tremaine, "the murderer struck boldly from the front—he didn't think it necessary to steal up behind."

"But why didn't Graham defend himself? He was armed. Why did he let him get so near?"

"There's only one possible explanation of that," said Tremaine drily, "supposing, of course, that Graham didn't fall asleep. He knew the man and thought him a friend. Perhaps they were even talking together at the time the blow was struck."

Delroy's face turned livid and great beads of sweat broke out across his forehead.

"That would explain it, certainly," he agreed hoarsely, "for there isn't the least likelihood that Graham was asleep. But it's too horrible, too fiendish. I can't believe it."

He turned away to the window, without answering, and stood there rolling a cigarette between his

fingers and staring out across the water. The storm had passed, but by the broad bands of light which flashed incessantly along the horizon, he could see the waves still tossing wildly in the bay. He lighted the cigarette with one long inhalation, and stood there smoking it, his back to the room and its dreadful occupant. Delroy sat limply down upon a chair and buried his head in his hands.

Presently there came the sound of footsteps on the walk, the door opened, and young Graham and Thomas came in.

"Doctor Wise promised t' come at once, sir," said the latter to Delroy, his voice dropped instinctively to a hoarse whisper. "He said he'd bring the coroner with him."

Delroy nodded without looking up.

"Anything else I can do, sir?" asked Thomas, with one horrified glance at the still form on the cot.

"Yes; go back to the house and bring down some whiskey and half a dozen glasses."

"Very well, sir," and Thomas hurried away. He was back in a surprisingly few minutes.

"Give Mr. Tremaine a glass," said Delroy. "Tremaine," he called, "take a bumper, or you'll be catching cold," and he himself brimmed a glass and drained it at a draught. Tremaine took his more slowly.

"You, too, William," said Delroy. "Here, you need it."

The boy, who had been standing beside the cot, his hands clasping and unclasping convulsively, took the glass mechanically and swallowed its contents.

Thomas carried the tray to the farthest corner and

sat down. Seeing that no one noticed him, he filled a glass for himself with a trembling hand.

Ten, twenty, thirty minutes passed—thirty centuries during which no one spoke. Then they heard the swift clatter of a horse's hoofs, the whir of wheels, and a buggy pulled up before the door. Thomas had it open on the instant and two men walked in.

"What is it, Delroy?" asked one of them. "Nothing serious I—ah!" he added, as his eyes fell upon the cot.

He went to it quickly, the other following; touched the hideous wounds, looked into the eyes, felt the temples.

"He's dead," he said, at last; "has been dead two or three hours, I should say. His skull is crushed—fairly beaten in. "It's your gardener, Graham, isn't it?"

"Yes," Delroy answered.

The doctor stepped back.

"I turn the case over to you, Heffelbower," he said. "It's in your province now. Mr. Delroy, this is Mr. Heffelbower, the coroner."

Heffelbower bowed. He was a little, stout man, bald headed and with wide open blue eyes that stared like a doll's. Primarily, he was a saloon keeper, but had been elected coroner as a reward for his valuable services to his party. He possessed a certain native shrewdness which fitted him to some extent for the office; also a lack of nerves and a familiarity with crime which might often be of service.

"I presume," he began slowly, "t'at t'is man wasn't killed here in his bed?"

"No," said Delroy, "we found him lying out on

the pier yonder. We thought it only common humanity to bring him in, since there might have been a spark of life left."

"Oh, of course," agreed the coroner, instantly, visibly impressed by Delroy's presence. "T'at was right. Who found t'e body?"

"His son, there," and Delroy indicated young Graham by a gesture.

The coroner turned toward him; it was easy to see that he had a high opinion of his own ability as a cross-examiner and detector of crime. He wasn't actually smiling, but his round face was shining with satisfaction. Babylon and the neighbouring villages are quiet places, and this was Heffelbower's first important case since his election. He would show his constituents how wise their choice had been.

"My dear sir," he began, evidently proud of his command of language, the result of many years of saloon debates, and speaking with distressing care but with a racial inability to conquer the "th," "I know such a recital will be painful to you—most painful—but I must hear from you just how t'e discovery was made. You will naturally be more anxious t'an anyone to bring to justice t'e scoundrel who committed t'is crime, so please give us all t'e details possible. T'en I will know how to proceed."

From the moment of his entrance, Tremaine had been contemplating the coroner with half-closed eyes; now, he turned back to the window with a little contemptuous smile.

"I'll tell everything I know, sir," said William, coming forward eagerly. "I went up t' th' house about

nine o'clock and brought this cot down, intendin' t' turn in here an' relieve father at midnight. Father was settin' out there on th' pier a-smokin' his pipe when I turned in. I went t' sleep almost as soon as I touched th' piller. I don't know how long it was, but after a while I kind o' woke up an' heard voices a-talkin' out there on th' pier. I got up an' looked out th' winder an' purty soon I saw it was Mr. Drysdale with father."

"Drysdale? Who's he?" asked the coroner.

"He's a friend of mine," spoke up Delroy quickly. "An old friend. He's staying here at the house with us. In fact, he's to marry my wife's sister."

The coroner bowed.

"Very well," he said, turning back to Graham, "you may continue."

"Well," went on the young fellow, "as soon as I saw it was Mr. Drysdale, I knowed it was all right, so I went back to bed ag'in. An' I didn't know nothin' more till a great clap o' thunder nearly took th' roof off th' house. I set up in bed, but I couldn't seem t' git awake fer a minute, my head was whirlin' so. Then I got on my feet an' looked out th' winder an' jest then it lightened ag'in an' I seen father layin' there——"

He stopped with a sob that shook him through and through.

"That will do for t'e present," said the coroner kindly. "It seems rather extraordinary," he added, turning to Delroy, "t'at t'is man should have sat out t'ere in t'e rain at t'at time of night. Was he fishing?"

Delroy sprang to his feet with a sudden start.

"Fishing?" he cried. "No! I'd forgotten. He was guarding my wife's necklace."

He threw open the door and ran out on the pier, the others following. At the extreme end a rope was dangling in the water. He reached over and pulled it up. The wire cage was flapping open. The necklace had disappeared.

CHAPTER VII

A Tightening Coil

THE horizon was grey with the coming dawn, but it was still too dark on the pier to see anything distinctly, so they went slowly back together to the boathouse.

"Was t'e necklace a valuable one?" asked the coroner, as he closed the door.

"It was worth over a hundred thousand dollars," answered Delroy, and explained briefly the purpose of the immersion.

"How many persons were aware of your intention to put it in t'e water out here?" asked Heffelbower, when he had finished.

Delroy hesitated.

"So far as I know," he answered slowly, at last, "only myself, my wife, her sister, Miss Croydon, Drysdale, Tremaine, and the two Grahams."

"Tremaine?" repeated the coroner. "I don't t'ink you have mentioned him."

"Oh, I forgot to introduce you. This is Mr. Tremaine, Mr. Heffelbower, a friend of mine, who is staying with me."

The coroner bowed, but he shot Tremaine a sharp glance which did not escape Delroy's notice.

"You will understand, Mr. Heffelbower," he added quickly, "I believe the crime was committed by some-

one else—I'm sure none of these could have committed it."

"Ah," said the coroner blandly, "t'en t'ey were all in t'e house, I suppose?"

"I can answer positively that my wife, Miss Croydon, and Mr. Tremaine were in the house the entire evening."

"And Mr. Drysdale?"

"Drysdale went out for a walk."

"A long one?"

"He was gone two or three hours."

"Iss he in t'e habit of walking after night?"

"No," answered Delroy slowly, "I can't say that he is."

"Did you see him when he came in?"

"Yes—I was looking out the window at the storm."

"Did he appear as usual?"

Again Delroy hesitated.

"I see, of course," he said, at last, "what you're aiming at; but I'm sure that Drysdale can explain his absence, as well as everything that happened during it. I therefore answer candidly that he did not appear as usual; he seemed excited and depressed. He left me in a fit of anger and went to his room."

"Wit'out explaining his action?"

"Yes—he made no effort to explain it."

"Did any explanation occur to you?"

"I thought perhaps he was worrying over losses incurred in speculation."

"Ah!—he has incurred such losses, t'en?"

"I do not know positively," said Delroy, a little impatiently. "I merely suspect so."

"Iss Mr. Drysdale still in his room?"

"Yes, I suppose so. I haven't seen him since he went up to it."

"Mr. Tremaine was wit' you at t'e time Mr. Graham burst in and announced t'e murder?"

"Yes, we were in the hall talking together."

"What time was it?"

"Nearly one o'clock, I should say."

"T'ank you," and Heffelbower turned back to make a more detailed examination of the body. "Doctor Wise," he asked, after a moment, "from which direction should you say t'ese blows were struck?"

"From directly in front," answered the doctor promptly.

"But I see he has a pistol at his belt. Why did he not tefend himself? Why should he allow himself to be beaten down?"

"That question also occurred to me," observed Delroy. "Mr. Tremaine suggested that it was because Graham thought his murderer a friend and anticipated no assault. So he allowed him to approach unchallenged, and was wholly unprepared for the treacherous attack."

The coroner looked at Tremaine again with a glance in which suspicion had changed to admiration.

"T'at iss, indeed, a very probable explanation," he said. "In fact, I haven't t'e least doubt it iss t'e true one. Graham would not have allowed a stranger to approach him; but if he had come on, Graham would have prepared for t'e attack and would have given a

good account of himself. He seems a fery powerful man."

As he spoke, he lifted one of the muscular hands; then, with a little exclamation of surprise, he bent and examined it more closely.

"Come nearer, gentlemen," he said, his face flushed with excitement. "I want you to witness t'at he has somet'ing between his fingers."

They stooped and looked as he indicated. They could see that the hand clasped tightly some small, dark object.

"Let us see what it is," Heffelbower continued, and bent back the stiffening fingers.

The object fell out into his hand. He held it up in the glare of the light so that all might see. It was a button with a little shred of cloth attached.

"If we can find t'e garment t'at t'is came from," said the coroner triumphantly, turning it over and looking at it, "we shall probably find t'e murderer. It iss a good clew."

He placed the button carefully in his pocket-book and turned to the window.

"I t'ink it iss light enough," he said, "to take a look at t'e scene of t'e crime. I shall t'en return to Babylon——"

"I have thought," remarked Delroy, "of calling in a New York detective. Should you object——"

"Not in t'e least," Heffelbower broke in. "I shall welcome eferyt'ing t'at will assist in bringing t'e guilty person to justice. Only," he added pompously, "wit' t'e clews which I already possess, and wit' t'e ot'ers which I expect to find, I believe it will be unnecessary.

T'e guilty man will not escape, I'll promise you t'at, Mr. Delroy," and he opened the door and stepped out upon the pier.

Dawn was in the sky, a clear, warm, joyous dawn. In tree and bush and hedge the birds were welcoming it. All nature was rejoicing, quite indifferent to the human tragedy which had marked the night.

They went together down the pier to the spot where Graham had fallen. The rain had washed away nearly all the blood-stains. His rifle lay on the pier beside the chair in which he had been sitting. The chair was overturned.

"But t'e wind may have done t'at," said the coroner, when Delroy pointed out that the overturned chair suggested a struggle. "Or maybe he knocked it over when he fell. Let's have a look at t'at little cage."

He pulled up the rope. The lid of the cage was open, but it did not seem to be injured.

"Maybe t'e waves proke it open," suggested Heffelbower.

"They couldn't have done that," objected Delroy. "See—here's how it fastened."

He closed the lid and snapped into place three small but very strong hooks, which locked automatically.

"The only thing that could open it," he added, "was a human hand."

"And an intelligent one, at t'at," concluded the coroner. "It would be very hard to find t'ose little hooks in t'e dark, unless one knowed just where t'ey were."

"Yes," admitted Delroy. "That's true."

Heffelbower opened his lips to say something more; then changed his mind, closed them, and turned away with a significant smile. He examined the knots in the rope, the pier, the waters of the bay, on which, just beyond the pier, a small boat was riding at anchor.

"T'e boat iss yours, I suppose, Mr. Delroy?" he asked.

"Yes—it has been there ready for use since Saturday."

As he spoke, a gust of wind swung the boat in towards them.

Young Graham, who was standing on the extreme edge of the pier, glanced down into it, and uttered a sudden exclamation.

"What's that?" he cried, with arm outstretched.

The others followed the gesture, but a second gust swung the boat away.

"What was it?" asked the coroner.

Without answering, Graham sprang into the water, and with a few strokes reached the boat. He climbed into it and untied it from the buoy. Then, at the instant another gust of wind came from the ocean, he released his hold. The boat was swept against the pier; he fended her off with the boathook and made fast.

"This is what I meant," he said, and pointed to a pistol lying at his feet.

They stared down at it, amazed. It was the coroner who spoke first:

"Hiss it up," he said.

He turned it over carefully in his hand. It was a

fine type of the Smith & Wesson. It was fully loaded; none of the chambers had been discharged.

"Ah," he said, "see t'ere," and he pointed to a clot of blood on the butt. "T'e butt iss very heavy," he added, turning it up. "And see—here are some initials—J. T. D. Whose are t'ey?"

"They are John Tolbert Drysdale's," answered Delroy in a low voice.

CHAPTER VIII

The Hand of the Law

FOR a full moment the coroner stood looking down at the pistol in his hand without speaking, but his face hardened and grew stern, so far as lay in the power of a countenance so rubicund.

"I t'ink I shall have to see Mr. Drysdale before I go back to Babylon," he said. "But first, let us try to account for t'e presence of t'is pistol in t'at boat."

"How can it be accounted for?" demanded Delroy impatiently. "Good God! I tell you Jack Drysdale never killed that man. Perhaps he was boating yesterday—no, he was in New York yesterday—well, Sunday, then, and had the pistol with him and left it in the boat by mistake. How else could it have got there? The murderer wouldn't have put it there."

"Nobody's used th' boat, sir," said William.

"How do you know t'at?" asked the coroner sharply.

"Because, sir, I tied it t' the buoy, an' I know my knot. It's th' same one I jest unfastened."

"You mean that boat hasn't been away from the buoy since you tied it there?" asked Delroy.

"Jest that, sir."

"Then how did the revolver get in it?"

Delroy and Heffelbower looked at each other help-

lessly. Tremaine was rolling another cigarette, and the coroner, glancing at him, noted the meaning smile which passed across his lips.

"Have you a t'eory, Mr. Tremaine?" he questioned respectfully. "I should be fery glad to hear it, iff you have."

"Why, yes," answered Tremaine slowly, "a possible explanation occurs to me. However, it's only a theory, and so may be worth nothing, but it seems to me that after committing a crime like that, the murderer would seek instantly to dispose of the weapon with which it was committed. What better hiding place could he ask than the waters of the bay? He would hurl the pistol far out—only, by a strange chance, instead of falling into the water, it fell into the boat. Of course, he added, in another tone, "I fully agree with Mr. Delroy that Mr. Drysdale could not have committed the crime. The pistol no doubt passed from his possession some time ago. He can explain that."

Heffelbower nodded with open admiration.

"Yes," he said; "I'll ask him about it. I'm sure your t'eory iss t'e correct one, Mr. Tremaine. I present you my compliments. You yourself did not leave t'e house yesterday evening?"

"Mr. Delroy can tell you."

"No," answered Delroy, "Mr. Tremaine did not leave the house yesterday evening."

"Nobody went out except Mr. Drysdale," spoke up Thomas. "I was in th' vestibule till nearly midnight, when Mr. Delroy told me t' go to bed."

"You saw Mr. [illegible] in?"

"Yes, sir; an' I never saw anybody so worked up an' nervous-like."

"Do you remember what outer garment he wore?"

"He wore his rain-coat, sir; I helped him on an' off with it."

"Where are t'e rain-coats kept?"

"They usually hang on the rack in th' vestibule, sir. That's Mr. Drysdale's coat that Mr. Delroy has on now."

"Yes," said Delroy, looking down at it; "I didn't notice: I snatched it down in such a hurry——"

He stopped, staring down at the coat, his face suddenly livid.

The others followed his glance.

The top button of the coat was missing. It had evidently been wrenched away with violence, for the cloth was badly torn.

Amid a silence strained, absolute, the coroner took from his pocket-book the button he had found in Graham's hand.

"I believe Mr. Drysdale will find it difficult to explain t'is, gentlemen," he said, his face glowing more and more, and he held against the place the button he had found.

It fitted it exactly: the button matched the others on the coat: the shred of cloth was of the same colour and material as the remainder of the garment. It was a proof there could be no disputing.

Heffelbower slowly replaced the button in his pocket-book.

"May I trouble you to take off t'e coat, Mr. Delroy?" he said: and when Delroy complied, he threw

it over his arm. "T'ere's just one more question," he added. "I suppose Mr. Drysdale's financial condition iss good?"

"Why, yes," answered Delroy. "I have always so considered it."

There was a hesitation in his manner which Heffelbower noticed.

"You mean you do not so consider it at t'is moment? Don't try to shield him, Mr. Delroy. Iff he iss innocent he will have no difficulty in proving it; if he iss guilty, he should be punished."

"Well, then," said Delroy, with a kind of desperate calm, "I've already told you that I heard he'd been speculating in steel. There was a crash, Saturday, you know; but for how much he was caught, or whether he was caught at all, I don't know. You'll have to ask him about that."

"T'ank you for your frankness," said the coroner. "Frankness never yet hurt an innocent man. I t'ink t'at iss all we can do here. Let us go up to t'e house and have a talk with Mr. Drysdale."

They followed him in silence from the boathouse and up the broad gravel path. Thomas opened the door for them.

"Shall I have Drysdale called down?" asked Delroy, as they stepped inside.

"No," said the coroner. "I'd prefer to see him in his room."

"Very well," the other acquiesced, and led the way through the still-deserted hall and up the stair

At the top, Tremaine turned to the coroner.

"If you don't mind," he said, "I'll go on to my

room. I'm feeling pretty well used up. My room is right here next to Mr. Drysdale's. If you want me, you can call me."

"Certainly, sir," agreed Heffelbower instantly. "And let me t'ank you again for your fery faluable suggestions."

"Oh, not at all," returned Tremaine, and entered his room.

The others went on to the next door. Delroy knocked.

"Who's there?" queried Drysdale's voice.

"Open up, Jack," called Delroy. "We've got to see you on some rather important business."

"Important business!" Drysdale repeated, and they heard him cross the room. Then the door was flung open. "Come in—why, what the deuce is all this about, Dickie?"

"Come in and shut the door, Jack," replied Delroy quietly. "This gentleman is Coroner Heffelbower, of Babylon. He wishes to ask you a few questions."

Drysdale answered with a stare of amazement, but he stood aside and let them pass into the room.

"Why, what's all this, Jack?" asked Delroy, looking about at the disorder.

Drysdale closed the door and turned toward him rather sheepishly.

"Fact is, I was packing, Dickie," he said. "I've got to go back to New York to-day, to look after some investments. I'd like to stay, old man, but I really can't——"

Something in the faces of his auditors stopped him, and he changed colour.

"What do you fellows want, anyway?" he demanded hotly.

"Sit down, Mr. Drysdale," said the coroner solemnly, himself taking a chair. "Our business may take some little time. You own a revolver, I believe."

"Yes," said Jack, "a Smith & Wesson. I was just looking for it. When I opened my trunk just now, I missed it."

"How long has it been since you saw it?"

"I can't say—two or three days, perhaps."

"You kept it in your trunk?"

"Yes."

"And the trunk was locked?"

"Yes—that is, generally."

"Was it locked last night?"

"Yes—that is, I don't know—I'm not certain. Why?"

"Did you have your revolver last night?"

"No, I haven't seen it for a day or two, I tell you."

"Iss t'is your revolver?" asked the coroner, producing the weapon

Drysdale took it and looked at it with an air of astonishment.

"Why, yes," he said. "Where did you get it?"

"And iss t'is your rain-coat?"

"Yes—but what ---"

"You wore it when you went out last night?"

"Yes—but I insist ---"

"Mr. Drysdale," asked the coroner sternly, "for

what purpose did you go out last night, and where did you go?"

Drysdale sprang to his feet, his face red with anger.

"Why, you infernal busy-body!" he cried. "It's none of your business."

"T'en you refuse to answer?"

"I most certainly do, and I think you'd better go back to Babylon."

"I shall go back in due time, Mr. Drysdale," retorted the coroner in a cool voice, holding up his hand. "Perhaps you have, as yet, not heard of t'e murder committed here last night and of t'e robbery which accompanied it?"

Drysdale paled suddenly, his hands were trembling . . .

"Murder!" he repeated blankly. "Robbery!"

"Precisely. Graham t'e gardener was murdered last night and Mrs. Delroy's pearl necklace stolen. You were t'e only person who left t'e house. Your revolver was found beside him. T'is button, torn from your coat, was found in his hand. I hope you will now perceive t'e wisdom of giving us a tetailed account of your movements while you were away from t'e house."

Drysdale had listened with a growing pallor. When the coroner finished, he was fairly livid, and he passed his hand helplessly before his eyes. But he did not speak.

"Well?" asked Heffelbower impatiently, after a moment.

Drysdale took down his hand and steadied himself against the back of his chair.

"I have nothing to say," he murmured hoarsely.

The coroner stared in astonishment.

"You don't mean——"

"I mean that I have nothing to say," repeated Drysdale, this time in a firmer tone.

"Oh, come, Jack," burst out Delroy, "don't be so obstinate. Tell us where you were. Of course I know you didn't murder Graham."

"Thank you, Dickie," and Drysdale looked at him gratefully. "I didn't do it; I'm ready to swear that by any oath you please. But I can't tell you or anybody where I was."

"Don't let any little secret stand in the way," protested Delroy. "This isn't the time——"

"I can't tell," repeated Drysdale firmly.

"Do you persist in t'at decision?" asked the coroner sharply.

"I certainly do."

"T'en," said Heffelbower, rising in his turn, "in t'e name of t'e law, I shall haf to arrest you. Please finish your dressing."

"Very well," returned Drysdale composedly, and set about his toilet, while Delroy watched him in a kind of dazed perplexity. It took but a few moments. "I'm ready," he said.

"Jack!" cried Delroy again, but the other stopped him with a gesture.

"Don't worry, Dickie," he said. "I didn't do it. They can't convict me. I'm not in the least afraid."

Heffelbower took the key from the door and transferred it to the outside.

"I'll haf to lock up t'is room," he said. "It will haf to be searched."

Delroy nodded his consent and the little procession passed out into the hall.

Suddenly from the farther end came the swish of skirts and Grace Croydon appeared, radiant as the new day. She paused in astonishment as she saw the group, then she came forward. Her eyes went anxiously from face to face.

"What is it, Richard?" she asked. "What has happened?"

Delroy laughed a mirthless laugh.

"Enough and [illegible] spare," he answered. "They're arresting Jack, here, f[illegible] murder."

"For murder!" she b[illegible]hed, and caught at the balustrade. "Oh, surely, you're joking!"

"Jack seems to think it's a joke," he retorted bitterly.

"Oh, why did you kill him?" she cried, turning upon her lover. "Why did you not wait——"

"Kill him!" echoed Delroy. "But he didn't, Grace! How can you think such a thing? He could clear himself by telling where he was last night, and he refuses to do it. Maybe he'll tell *you*."

She turned her searching eyes to her lover's face.

"Where were you last night, Jack?" she asked. "You'll tell me, won't you?"

"Tell *you?*" he sneered, his eyes blazing with savage anger. "Where was I? *You* ask me that?"

And with a gesture of fierce contempt, he went on down the stair.

PART IV

DAWN

CHAPTER I

A Thread Breaks

IT was not until the Sunday evening following Tremaine's departure that I found myself alone with Cecily and in a position to begin that conversation from which I hoped so much.

In the morning I had taken her to mass at the cathedral, where she had listened with rapt countenance. In the afternoon, the weather being very pleasant, we drove out to the Bronx to see the animals and the conservatories, in which she was as interested as any child. In fact, I found myself treating her more and more as a child. She was essentially one in character—self-willed, easily downcast and as easily elated; and though she was religious to a degree amounting almost to superstition, it seemed never to have occurred to her that there was anything wrong or irregular in her manner of life. She was frankly Tremaine's mistress, evidently cherished a deep affection for him, and, I doubt not, would have been faithful to him under any but the most extraordinary temptation.

She had arrayed herself, that Sunday evening, in the same garments she had worn the first night I had met her—the gorgeous costume of the belle at Franchie, in which she was most at home—but I had grown more accustomed to her and sat down near her without any great bedazzlement. She was lying

on the couch, engaged in rolling cigarettes with remarkable skill and celerity, and had quite a pile on the tabouret beside her. I sat and watched the supple fingers and the red, red lips, and the dark face, changing with every wave of feeling.

"There," she said, at last, in that queer, chipped soft Creole which defies transcription, and she pushed away papers and tobacco. "That will do for this evening. Take one, cher."

I took one and lighted it. I knew that the term of endearment had no meaning.

"My friend," she said suddenly, turning to me with intent gaze, "do you know where doudoux has gone?"

"No," I answered, "he did not tell me. He said only that his business was calling him away."

"Business! Ohé! And you believe that?"

"Why shouldn't I believe it, Cecily?"

"If it were merely business, he could have taken me along. Tambou! I would have hidden in some little, little corner! I would not have been in the way."

She flung her cigarette from her with a swift fury, not looking to see where it struck. I got up and stamped it out. She burst into sudden laughter as she watched me—the mirth of the careless South at the careful North.

"All the same," she said, with conviction, "he is growing weary of me; I annoy him; I can see it. It was, of course, inevitable. Soon he will be sending me away. Ohé!" and she stretched her arms above her head with that gesture I had seen before. "Ah

well! d'amour, de rires, et d'oubli's!" and she laughed, but I fancied there was a sob beneath the laughter. "At least, I shall be again at St. Pierre."

"And you still long for it?"

"Oh, long for it! So would you, chè, if you had ever lived there."

A line from Mandalay flashed into my head—

> It's ye've heard the East a-callin', why, you don't hed nothin' else."

and looking at her, I caught a glimpse of that compelling fascination. Preachers and lecturers are fond of pointing out that no great nation ever came from the tropics—but the people who live there have their compensations.

Suddenly there came a soft hissing from the little cage over the radiator.

"Ah, I must feed Fé-Fé—she is calling me," she cried, and she sprang up, ran to the next room, and came back with a little wine in a glass.

I stood and watched her without being greatly impressed. Fé-Fé seemed very harmless and lethargic—evidently the climate of New York, even though mellowed by the radiator, did not agree with her.

"She is not at all well," said Cecily, as she put her back into her cage. "It is only the warmth of the wine that keeps her alive. I shall take her back to St. Pierre with me—there she will again be happy. Tambou! and so shall I! One is always shivering here—the whole world is so cold—the sky, the sea, even the sun!"

"Of course Tremaine will go back with you," I

assured her; I was wondering if she really suspected his intention.

"No, he will not," she said decidedly; "but," she added, with an electric flash of the eyes, "he may come in time."

I lighted another cigarette.

"Where did you meet him, Cecily?"

"He came to St. Pierre three, four years ago. He saw me one day standing at the door of my house in the Rue Peysette."

"Do you know where he came from?"

"No; it mattered nothing to me."

"He never talked about his past?"

"His past? No, no. What was it to us? We had a pretty, pretty place at Fond-Corré. Tambou! I wish I was there now!"

"You were happy there?"

"Yes—except for the times doudoux was in his black spells."

"His black spells?"

"Yes—oh, then everyone ran from him—even I. He was terrible—raving and cursing Missié Johnson."

"Johnson?" I repeated, with a sudden leap of the heart. "Who was he, Cecily?"

"He was doudoux's zombi," she anwered with conviction, and crossed herself.

"Then he didn't live at Fond-Corré?"

"At Fond-Corré? Oh, no! He was a zombi—in the air, in the earth, everywhere. Doudoux would fight with him an hour at a time. Oh, it was terrible!"

I leaned back in my chair and watched the smoke from my cigarette circling upwards. I remembered the letter that had been tattooed on the arm of the man killed in suite fourteen. So Tremaine had some cause to hate him—he had helped him, had supplied him with whiskey, with money, through fear and not through friendship. To establish that was to take another step forward.

"Did he have those spells often, Cecily?" I asked, at last.

"Oh, no; sometimes not for months. Then, phut! the zombi would charm him."

"Charm him?"

"With a little scrap of paper, yes. There would come a letter; doudoux would open it; always in it there would be a little piece of paper. Sometimes it had writing on it, sometimes printing, as though it had been cut from a newspaper. Then, tambou! doudoux's face would grow black, he would tear the paper into little, little bits, uttering curses the most terrible, and we would all run!"

Clippings from a newspaper! Here was a coincidence. But I cudgelled my brain vainly—I could form no theory as to why a clipping should cause those fits of rage.

"The last one, though, did not give him a spell," she added, after a moment. "We were watching the sun set out across the water when Dodol brought the letter to him. This time it was printing and writing both; I got up, ready to flee, for I thought that would be twice as bad; but no. He sat reading it and his eyes glistened, then he sent me running for his hat

and hurried away to St. Pierre. When he came back, he told me that we were to come at once to New York."

It was exasperating. I felt that the secret lay just under my hand, and yet I could not grasp it. I seemed to be revolving round and round about it, without getting any nearer. What could the message be which brought Tremaine hot foot to New York?

That was the question to which there seemed no possibility of finding the answer at present; besides I thought it well to lead the talk away from Tremaine for a while, or even Cecily, unsuspecting as she was, might guess my purpose. So I turned to another point.

"You have some very pretty jewelry, Cecily," I said, touching the great brooch of gold that gleamed at her throat.

She laughed like a pleased child.

"Yes—are they not pretty, chè? Let me show you," and springing from the couch, she ran into her bedroom. In a moment she was back again, a box of inlaid ebony in her hands.

"See!" she cried, and threw back the lid.

Indeed they were worth seeing, and it was not wholly to disarm her suspicions, if she had any, that I lingered over them. At last, I came to the piece I wanted.

"Here is a beautiful pin," I said. "An opal in a circle of diamonds," and I held it up to the light. "But see, Cecily; one of the diamonds is missing. Have you lost it?"

"Doudoux lost it," she answered. "He wore it

sometimes as a pin for his scarf. Tambou! I was angry when I found it gone. You should have heard me!"

"I have a diamond," I said, getting out my pocket-book, "that might do to replace it. Let us see if it will fit."

I unwrapped the little brilliant and applied it to the break in the circle. Then my heart fell. It was evident in an instant that it had not come from there—it was much smaller than the other stones,—differently cut . . .

I have seldom experienced a more poignant pang of disappointment. I seemed to have lost more than I had gained. Where, then, had this diamond come from? Who was it had dropped it in suite fourteen? I was lost, confused, utterly at sea. And a moment before, I had been so confident! Well, it was right; it was just! This would be the fate of the whole silly, flimsy fabric we were trying to build against Tremaine.

"No, it will not do," I stammered, at last. "It is too small," and I returned it to my pocket. "I shall have to get you another trinket, Cecily."

She thanked me with a child's exuberance, then put away her jewels and came back to the divan, talking of many things. But my attention wandered; I answered her mechanically, or not at all; I felt the need of being alone and setting my discoveries in order; of finding out whether I had gained or lost ground. In any event, we should have to take a fresh start—the trail we had been following led nowhere—ended in a swamp.

Cecily perceived my indifference in a moment—she

had a temperament which seemed to scent instinctively every change of feeling—and she threw her arms above her head with that gesture of weariness which I had seen before.

"Adié, chè," she said abruptly.

"Good-night, Cecily," I answered, rising, smiling in spite of myself at my curt dismissal, at her change of tone.

"Bon-Dié ké beni ou!"

"And you, Cecily."

As I turned to the door, I heard the rustle of her gown as she arose from the couch. My hand on the knob, I glanced around, expecting to find her at my elbow. Instead, she was kneeling, with bowed head, before her Virgin.

CHAPTER II

Treasure Trove!

IT seemed that my sudden abstraction had offended Cecily more deeply than I imagined, for when I knocked at her door next evening, she told me curtly that she was not feeling well and intended going early to bed. So I went back to my room, rather glad of the chance of an evening to myself.

Besides, Cecily was a good deal like a highly flavoured dish—to be fully enjoyed only at intervals. And, too, there was only one point as yet unsettled—where she and Tremaine had been the night of the murder. That, I felt, could be cleared up without much difficulty the first time she received me, which would probably be not later than to-morrow. I had a premonition that that line of inquiry, too, would lead nowhere—that Cecily would prove, by a word, that neither she nor Tremaine had been anywhere near the Marathon at the hour of the crime. In any event I had plenty of time, and I could spend this evening very profitably in weighing and classifying my discoveries; in getting a fresh start.

As I opened my door, I noticed it scraped on the carpet, and an examination showed me that the carpet had come loose along the sill. I stepped to the speaking tube and blew down it.

"Hello!" called up a voice in a moment.

"Is that you, Higgins?"

"Yes, sir."

"This is Mr. Lester. Come up after a while, will you? I've a little job up here I want you to do."

"All right, sir; will half an hour do?"

"Oh, yes; any time this evening."

I got out pipe, tobacco, and matches and sat down in my most comfortable chair. I was no longer so discouraged as I had been the evening before. On the whole, I told myself, I had progressed—I had succeeded in forging the chain more tightly about Tremaine, in strengthening it in many places. I could show certainly:

1.—That he knew Thompson and had lied about it.

2.—That he apparently hated him.

3.—That he had come to New York on the same boat with him, and probably on the same errand.

4.—That Thompson had joined him as soon as released from jail.

On paper, I had to admit, the chain appeared a good deal weaker than I had thought it. There were many gaps—indeed, now that I looked at it, it seemed to consist largely of gaps. Objections to the theory of Tremaine's guilt loomed larger and larger. One of the weightiest was Miss Croydon's attitude toward him—that seemed unexplainable. The man she described as the murderer was quite unlike Tremaine in appearance. Was she, then, shielding him? But why should she do that? Above all, if he were guilty of such a crime, would she have consented to his admission to the Delroy family? And again, if she feared him, why not denounce him to the police, or at least

threaten to do so? That would remove him from her path once and forever.

This last question seemed so unanswerable that I paused to look at it again, for it was evident that one really insuperable objection must invalidate the whole theory. By the commission of a crime, especially of a crime so serious as this one, would he not place himself as much in Miss Croydon's power as she could possibly be in his? If she were still in his power, then, he had committed no crime; and if he had committed no crime, why, of course, he had not killed Thompson. But in that case, who had? Where had that diamond come from?

I knocked out my pipe and filled it again. I felt a good deal as though I was wandering around and around in a maze; I was getting a little dizzy.

If Tremaine had not killed Thompson, I asked myself again, who had? Not Miss Croydon! To suppose that a delicately reared girl would smash a man over the head with a piece of pipe was to descend to the ridiculous. Yet if he had attacked her, she might have nerved herself to do it. But that was absurd, too, since, admittedly, she had a pistol in her pocket and was not afraid to use it. Who else, then? Jimmy the Dude? But he had already proved an alibi; besides, a motive was wanting.

Then I thought of Cecily. Could she have been the assassin? Certainly it was not impossible; that last savage act, that shooting of an unconscious man, fitted in, somehow, with my estimate of her character. She might have done that. But why should Miss Croydon seek to shield her? Was it Cecily who

possessed the secret? Was there some connection between them? I remembered the other famous case in which I had been engaged—must I look for the same solution here? Was there a blood relationship between Cecily and Miss Croydon? Clearly, such a thing was possible; I even fancied that one, knowing them both, might be able to detect a subtle resemblance. I closed my eyes and endeavoured to recall the features of Miss Croydon's portrait; her face had much in common with Cecily's. Both were dark, both were . . .

A knock at the door brought me out of my thoughts. I opened it and found the janitor standing there.

"It's nothing very much, Higgins," I said, "but I thought you'd better fix it before it got any worse. The carpet has come loose here along the door. Three or four tacks are all it need."

He stepped over the threshold and looked at it.

"All right, sir," he said. "I'll fix it in th' mornin'. Them fellers what put th' carpet down didn't half do their work. I tacked a loose place down over there by th' wall jest afore you moved in."

"Where was it?" I asked as calmly as I could.

"Right here by this angle," he said, indicating the place with his foot. "I think maybe I'd better go all around th' walls t'-morrer."

"Perhaps it would be best" I said; "thank you," and I closed the door upon him.

The next instant I was down on my hands and knees tearing away the carpet, my blood singing in my ears. I had found them—the clippings—it was here they must be hidden, but for those chance tacks

driven by the janitor, Tremaine would have had possession of them long ago, and perhaps we should never have penetrated the mystery of Thompson's death. Now, it would be laid bare before us—the whole secret! What a little thing it was that had saved us!

I had the carpet loose—I turned it back, and there they lay, that little roll of clippings, just as they had been taken from Thompson's pocket-book. They were to tell us the whole story—we could not again be led astray. I was quite calm again. I picked them up carefully and laid them on my desk. Then I washed my hands and filled my pipe. There was a certain exquisite pleasure in holding myself back from them, in tantalising myself, in deferring for a moment or two the revelation which was to come.

But at last I sat down and spread them out on the desk before me. There were twelve of them, some only a few lines in length, others of half a column. Of one there were four copies, but of the others only one apiece. They were tattered and stained from long carrying; some were in English and some were in French, and they were dated from places as far apart as Dieppe, New York, Sydney.

I piled them carefully beside me and started hopefully on the task of deciphering them—of piecing together the story they had to tell me. But the farther I proceeded, the more my spirits fell: for they told no story, they seemed to have no relation to each other—no common thread. Apparently, they had been gathered aimlessly at haphazard to satisfy the whim of the moment. One chronicled a wreck at sea;

another, a bank robbery; a third, an escape from prison; a fourth was merely a marriage notice; a fifth told of a row in a sailors' dive, and so on down the list. They were about different people—friends of Thompson's, perhaps; none of them had any connection with Tremaine; they told no story, furnished no clew, shed not a ray of light on the mystery—they were absolutely worthless.

I laid them down in despair. Yet if they were worthless, why had Miss Croydon taken them? Why had Tremaine sought for them? Were they mistaken, too? Had they imagined the clippings told a secret which in fact they did not tell? But perhaps they did tell it—perhaps I had overlooked it. They must have some connection with the tragedy? Why could I not perceive it?

I ran through them feverishly again, but with no better result. At last I laid them down and took up my pipe. I must submit them to a keener brain than mine. If Godfrey were only here . . .

I heard a step come down the hall, stop at my door. Someone knocked.

I hastily stuffed the clippings into my pocket and opened the door. But it was not Tremaine who stood there—it was Godfrey.

"Well, of all things!" I cried. "I was just wishing for you. Come in."

With that quiet smile of his, he stepped over the threshold.

"That must mean you've got some new problem to solve," he said, still smiling.

"I have; the worst yet; impenetrable as the counte-

nance of the Sphinx. But first give me your coat and hat."

They were dripping with water, and for the first time I heard the rain beating savagely against the windows.

"I happened to be across the street talking with Simmonds," he said, "and I thought I'd run over and see you a moment."

"When did you get back from Washington?"

"Just this evening, and I've got to put in to-morrow at Boston, worse luck!"

I handed him a cigar and took one myself. I confess that the match with which I lighted it was not wholly steady.

"Come," said Godfrey, smiling in sympathy with my excitement, "what's the great discovery? Some news from the house-party?"

"No; I haven't heard a word from the house-party."

"What is it, then? Out with it."

"Godfrey," I cried, "I've found the clippings!" and I plunged my hand into my pocket and drew them forth.

He was out of his seat in an instant.

"The clippings! Not the ones — "

"The very ones!" I nodded triumphantly.

"Let me see them; but wait," and he held himself back. "I confess you surprised me, Lester—I wasn't expecting such a bomb. This is great luck. Where did you find them?"

I told him of Higgins's chance remark that had put me on the track, and in the same breath related what Cecily had told me of Tremaine and his encounter with his zombi.

"Good boy!" Godfrey commended when I had finished. "You're worth all the rest of us put together. You see, we're beginning to get the threads in hand. Now bring the clippings over here to the desk under the light."

I laid them on the desk and he sat down before it.

"But here," he said, starting up again, "you'll want to see them, too——"

"No, no," I protested. "Sit down. I have seen them," and then suddenly I remembered how I had been disappointed. They contained no secret, they gave us no clew . . .

"So," he said, sitting down again; "so you're in the secret, then?"

"I've looked them over," I repeated despondently, "but I'm not in the secret. They don't tell any secret, or anything else that concerns this case. I don't believe they'll help us a bit, Godfrey. They're about everything under the sun but the one thing we're interested in."

I went back to my chair and applied myself to my cigar; I hardly dared look at Godfrey, his disappointment would be so intense. A silence of three or four minutes followed, broken only by the rustling of paper and the howling of the wind about the building.

Then I glanced at Godfrey. His cheeks were flushed, his eyes were beaming with triumph . . .

"What!" I cried, starting up, "do you think——"

He looked up with a little nod.

"Yes," he said; "they tell us the whole story, Lester."

CHAPTER III

A Study in Probabilities

FOR a moment I thought that Godfrey was joking. How could that tangle of haphazard clippings tell any story? And if they did, how could it be connected with the one which we were trying to decipher? Then, at a second glance, I saw how in deadly earnest he was. There could be no doubting it; he had read into them some meaning which I had failed utterly to see.

I sat down in my chair again, my nerves a-quiver; at last, we were on the verge of success.

"Well, let's hear it," I said.

"I intend that you shall—wait till I get them arranged. I'll build up the story as I go along, and I want you to ask any questions or point out any defects that occur to you. Of course, it will be only a study in probabilities; but between us, I think we can get it pretty straight."

He got up from the desk with the clippings in a neat little pile, and sat down in the chair facing mine. He took a meditative puff or two before he began.

"I'll have to start with a few general observations," he said, at last. "It's evident that Thompson wouldn't have carried these clippings around with him for so long unless they in some way concerned him. It's evident that Miss Croydon would never have dared to

take them unless she was pretty certain that they somehow vitally concerned her. It's evident that Tremaine wouldn't have taken so much trouble to look for them unless he was mighty anxious to find them. We arrive, then, at our first conclusion, namely, that these clippings necessarily shed some light upon the tragedy recently enacted in this room, and upon the connection of these people with each other."

"Yes," I agreed; "unless all these people were mistaken in their estimate of the value of the clippings."

"That, of course, is possible; but I don't think it probable. At any rate, let us disregard that suggestion for the moment, and proceed along the other line. What light is it possible for these clippings to shed on the murder of Thompson? Obviously, it must be only by explaining motives. The majority of them seem to be concerned with the adventures of a Frenchman, who goes under various names, but who, I am sure, is one and the same person. He must, then, be either Tremaine or Thompson. But Thompson was evidently not a Frenchman, and Tremaine pretty evidently is, though his contact with the world has served to rub away a good many of the marks. I think we're pretty safe, therefore, in assuming that the Frenchman of these clippings is Tremaine. As we go on, I believe we'll find some internal evidence confirming this. You agree with me thus far?"

"Perfectly," I said, "admitting your first premise that these clippings are really concerned with the case."

"That, too, I believe, we'll soon be able to prove

by internal evidence. Of course, if they haven't any connection with it, they'll soon lead us into chaos. But there's another thing; we mustn't expect too much from them. We mustn't expect a story complete in all its parts—it's bound to be fragmentary. The wonder is that Thompson succeeded in keeping this many links in the chain. Maybe in his more prosperous days he had a mania for clippings. At best, we mustn't be disappointed if there are long gaps in the story."

"Yes," I agreed again; "that's evident enough."

"Very well; we'll begin with the clippings, then, substituting Tremaine's name for the one used. The first clipping is merely a marriage notice, announcing that on the 23d of August, 1883, Tremaine married one Thérèse Bertigny, at Dieppe. Let me see; Tremaine was then probably about twenty years of age. No doubt he was born at Dieppe, so that the name given here, Victor Charente, is his real one. You'll notice that he's retained his first name—which is a bit of corroborative evidence."

"Or a mere coincidence," I supplemented.

"I'll wire our correspondent at Dieppe to look up this Charente—perhaps he can get a photograph. That would settle the question."

I nodded. Yes, that would settle it, for Tremaine at forty was probably not greatly different from Tremaine at twenty.

"The second clipping," proceeded Godfrey, "shows us that our hero soon wandered from the straight and narrow path, and gives us, too, a little light upon his personal history. In the spring following his mar-

riage—April 16, 1884, to be exact—while assistant manager of the ship supplies house of Briquet Frères, he absconds with sixty thousand francs. It is discovered that he kept a mistress a Rouen. He is believed to have gone to America—to have been smuggled out of the harbour by a friendly American captain. Surely, it is not impossible," he added, "that this friendly American captain was Thompson."

"Very few things are impossible," I commented; I began to be impatient with Godfrey. He was permitting his prejudice against Tremaine to warp his judgment.

"Well, we'll keep that for a hypothesis, anyhow," and he turned to the third clipping. "This," he continued, "shows us that he indeed came to America. It is dated July 23, 1885, and states that a young Frenchman and a tramp skipper named Johnson—ah, you see?"

I did, indeed, see—here was the first appearance of Tremaine's zombi—of his familiar devil. I looked at Godfrey with the liveliest admiration. This constructive reasoning was something which I, certainly, was quite incapable of.

"So that J on Thompson's arm was the initial of his real name," observed Godfrey. "I thought it was it had been there a long time, and an effort had been made to erase it. After a man has started on the crooked path, he doesn't want any tattoo marks on him—they make identification too easy. For John son, then, we'll hereafter read Thompson."

I nodded; I was beginning to be convinced.

"Well," continued Godfrey, "Tremaine and

Thompson, then, were arrested in New York, July 23, 1885, at a low resort where they were having a carouse. They had beaten and robbed another sailor. It seems that nothing was left of the sixty thousand francs, and naturally Tremaine found it difficult to go honestly to work again. The fourth clipping, undated, but probably some months later, shows that Tremaine and Thompson were sentenced to three years each in Sing Sing. But they didn't stay there so long," he added, turning to the next clipping, "at least Tremaine didn't. On the night of January 2, 1886, in the midst of a tremendous snowstorm, they managed to hide themselves in one of the workshops, and afterwards to scale the outer wall. In the morning Thompson was found at the foot of the wall with his head cut open and nearly frozen. Tremaine got clear away. Thompson was brought around with the greatest difficulty, and would say nothing except to indulge in terrible imprecations against his companion. You see," concluded Godfrey, looking up, "we begin to get at the motive."

"Yes," I agreed, "it's very plain, now you've started on the right track. It's a good deal like Columbus's egg."

Godfrey smiled and turned to the sixth clipping, the longest of them all.

"It's that way with most mysteries," he said, "and here's the internal evidence that all this theorizing is pretty straight. It's the clew, too, which we've been seeking so long."

"It explains Miss Croydon's presence here?" I asked, intensely interested and deeply stirred.

"Just that!" he said, and shot me a triumphant glance. "Let us see if you can catch it. The clipping is in French, and though my French isn't of the highest order, I can get the sense of it pretty well. It is dated Suresnes, and is evidently a letter from a provincial correspondent to a Paris newspaper, who like most other provincial correspondents, is delightfully vague. However, I gather from it that on the night of September 16, 1891, a beautiful young English girl—name not given—ran away from the convent school of the Sacred Heart at Suresnes and that the next morning she was safely married to a 'gallant Frenchman'—Tremaine, of course—by the curé of the little village of Petits Colombes. The marriage was quite regular—though no doubt the curé's fee was larger than usual—for the banns had been published as required. 'Thus,' concludes the eloquent correspondent, 'does the grand passion once more prevail over the hypocrisies of the cloister.' Evidently the correspondent is a rabid anti-clerical."

"But still," I objected, "I don't see that that explains anything."

"Let me help you. It was this clipping I happened to look at first the night we found the body. I read two or three lines aloud, then Simmonds put it back in the pocket. It must have been those few lines which told Miss Croydon the nature of the clippings and their importance to her. The date line would have been enough to do that. Besides, if she'd already known of them, she'd have taken them before we got here."

"You mean Miss Croydon is the girl who ran away

with Tremaine? But then, she couldn't have been more than ten or twelve years old in 1891."

"Eleven," corrected Godfrey, and I was struck by the radiant expression of his face as he took a yellow paper from his pocket. "Let me read you two sentences from this old report concerning the Croydon family—you ought to have recalled them, my dear Lester."

"Go ahead," I said helplessly.

"'Eldest daughter, Edith, born in France, August 26, 1874. Educated at school there, but broke down from overstudy and returned to Beckenham. Religion, Catholic.' Now," he demanded, "do you understand who it was married Tremaine at Petits Colombes in 1891?"

At last I saw it, and I could only sit and stare at him, marvelling at my own stupidity. This was the key—the key to the whole enigma. Miss Croydon had taken her sister's place, had tried to buy him off, to get him out of her sister's way. It was Tremaine who had opened the door—it was Tremaine whom she had come to the Marathon to meet. But—and I started upright—since they were Catholics, only his death could release Mrs. Delroy! Perhaps it was Thompson, after all, and his death had released her! But no; and in an instant the whole terrible position of the elder woman burst upon me. She was not Delroy's wife, she was . . .

"So," I said hoarsely, "Tremaine is then the true husband of Mrs. Delroy!"

"Let us finish the story of the clippings before going into that," suggested Godfrey. "I confess, I don't

quite see the bearing of this next one. It's a New York dispatch, perhaps to a London paper, under date of February 18, 1892, and chronicles the loss of the bark *Centaur*, with all on board, off the coast of Martinique. The *Centaur* was bound from Marseilles to Fort-de-France with a cargo of wines and muslins. Let us leave it, for a moment, and pass on to the next one, which is the last.

"This is dated Sydney, Australia, October 23, 1896, and relates how a daring scheme to rob the Bank of New South Wales was frustrated by a sailor who had been a member of the gang, but who got frightened and informed the police. The ringleader, a Frenchman, was captured and would receive a term of years in prison. There are four copies of this clipping, which no doubt means that it is the one which Thompson was sometimes in the habit of sending to Tremaine, to remind him of that Australian experience.

"Now, don't you see, we reconstruct the whole story. Tremaine, starting out as a defaulter and robber, escapes from prison, leaving his partner in the lurch, treacherously, no doubt, since it awakened his violent anger—there isn't any hatred more vindictive than that of one criminal toward another who has betrayed him. Tremaine finally goes back to France and succeeds in entangling Edith Crowden, then only about sixteen, in a marriage. We know how fascinating he is, and it's not wonderful that he should be able to mislead an inexperienced girl. Of course what he wants is money, and so she writes to her father. He comes to her and takes her home—no doubt paying

Tremaine a handsome sum to take himself off—in fact, mortgaging his home to do it.

"Miss Croydon gradually recovers; but she is Tremaine's wife. Yet in 1900 she marries Delroy. She must, therefore, have had good reason to believe Tremaine dead."

"Don't you see?" I cried. "That's the meaning of that item about the foundering of the *Centaur*, with all on board. Tremaine was a passenger and she knew it."

"Good!" nodded Godfrey. "That's undoubtedly it. Let me see," and he turned back to the clipping; "that was in 1892. His name, perhaps, appeared among the missing; she waited eight years, and at last, believing his death established beyond a doubt, married again.

"Now let us see what Tremaine was doing. In 1896 he was in Australia, planning a bank robbery. He meets Thompson, descended from his estate of captain to that of common sailor. Tremaine takes Thompson in on the plan; and Thompson, to get even for that treachery at Sing Sing, gives him away. Tremaine, no doubt, got a penitentiary sentence. He probably broke jail again, for in 1899 he appears at Martinique, supposedly from South America. He has considerable money, which he no doubt stole somewhere, and perhaps he chose St. Pierre as a safe place to stay in hiding until the hue and cry after him was over. He would have some acquaintance with the land, if he landed there from the wreck.

"Thompson learns where he is—perhaps even sees him at St. Pierre—and puts a bonquet to his revenge

by driving him into fits of rage by reminding him of that Australian treachery. But at last he sends him a message, which brings him to New York."

"Yes," I said, "and I have cudgelled my brain in vain trying to imagine what that message could have been."

"Well," remarked Godfrey, "while we can't, of course, give its actual text, I don't think it very difficult to guess its general tenor. We know what Tremaine came here to do—he came to blackmail Mrs. Delroy. It's pretty safe, then, to suppose that the message told him that she was blackmailable—in other words, that she had married a rich man. No doubt, Tremaine's money was running low, and he jumped at this chance of replenishing his purse. Thompson was working his way toward St. Pierre to join him, and actually reached there on the *Parima* just as Tremaine was leaving. Perhaps Tremaine had tried to play Thompson false a second time.

"Now," he continued, "let us see how nearly we can reconstruct the scene which occurred in this room. Tremaine supplies Thompson on the voyage up with whiskey, and agrees to keep him supplied, believing that he may be useful—not daring, at any rate, to make an open enemy of him, lest he spoil his game here—Thompson had only to speak a word to the police to put Tremaine back in Sing Sing to serve out his unexpired term. Arrived at New York, he establishes himself in the suite across the hall, and spends a week or two in looking over the ground, ostensibly boosting his railroad scheme. Thompson, who has been in jail, joins him and takes these rooms.

"At last Tremaine is ready—or perhaps his lack of money forces him to act. He writes a note to Mrs. Delroy, telling her that he's alive and wishes to share in her prosperity. He demands that she meet him in these rooms, asking for Thompson—that leaves him free from suspicion should she show the note to her husband and should he attempt to have the writer arrested for blackmail. But she isn't so sensible. Perhaps she disregards his first note; perhaps she's unable to decide what to do. She has, of course, been thrown into a panic. He writes again; in despair, she seeks the advice of her sister, and Miss Croydon, who is by far the stronger of the two, offers to come here herself, see the man, and find out what he proposes to do.

"Tremaine has secured Thompson's key, given him some money, and sent him out to get drunk. But for Jimmy the Dude, he would have stayed away—probably in the lock-up—but Jimmy brings him home. Tremaine has to make the best of it, since there isn't time to get Thompson out of the way again. Anyway, he's so dead-drunk, that Tremaine anticipates no interference from him. He shuts him in the bedroom, and sits down to wait for Miss Croydon.

"She arrives promptly, despite the rain, and we can imagine that the dialogue which followed was not of a milk-and-water kind—both of them are full of fire, and they made the sparks fly.

"Thompson is aroused by the voices, or perhaps wakes naturally—comes into the outer room and interferes. He is still half-drunk; perhaps he threatens Tremaine. At any rate, Tremaine picks up the iron pipe and knocks him down; then, in a sudden black

frenzy of anger, remembering Australia, seeing how Thompson will always stand in his way, he draws his revolver and shoots him through the heart. That done, he walks out, closes the door, goes to his room, and, at a favourable moment, leaves the building."

He leaned back in his chair and applied a fresh match to his cigar.

"That," he concluded, "is my idea of the story. There's one person who can fill in the details. I'm going to apply to her as soon as I get back from Boston."

"You mean Miss Croydon?"

"Yes," he nodded, "and I think Tremaine is pretty near the end of his adventurous career."

"There's one thing," I remarked, after a moment, "that diamond I found on the floor here didn't come from Tremaine's pin. I tried it last night and it didn't fit."

Godfrey smiled as he placed the clippings carefully in his pocket-book.

"I know it," he said; "I meant to tell you. It came from a ring belonging to Jimmy the Dude. I saw him to-night across the street—Simmonds had him in for another sweating—Simmonds isn't quite convinced yet that Jimmy's innocent—and I noticed a ring on his finger containing a cluster of little diamonds. One of them was gone, and when I questioned him, he said he'd lost it somewhere the night Thompson was killed. He probably dropped it here as he was helping Thompson to bed."

"That's it, no doubt," I agreed; "but it breaks one thread of evidence."

"We don't need it!" declared Godfrey confidently, as he arose to go. "We've got a chain about Tremaine, Lester, that he can't break—and we'll compel Miss Croydon to forge the last rivet."

But in my dreams that night, I saw him breaking the chains, trampling upon them, hurling them from him. I tried to hold them fast with all my puny strength, for I fancied that, once free, he would sweep over the earth like a pestilence. Then, suddenly, it was not Tremaine but Cecily I was holding; she turned to look at me with a countenance so terrible that it palsied me; her eyes scorched me with a white heat, burnt me through and through. Then she raised her hand and struck me a heavy blow upon the head—again—again—till, blindly, in agony, I loosed my hold of her and fell, fell . . .

CHAPTER IV

Cecily Says Good-bye

THE cold light of the morning brought with it a profound scepticism. Godfrey's theory no longer seemed so convincing; in fact, it did not seem convincing at all. Many objections occurred to me; I saw that the whole elaborate structure was built upon quicksand—there was no proof that any of the clippings referred to Tremaine or Thompson; there was no proof that Thompson had gathered them with elaborate care and of set purpose; there was no proof . . .

Yes—there was one point susceptible of proof; by it the whole structure would stand or fall . . .

"Mr. Royce," I said to our junior, in the course of the morning, "I wonder if I could be spared this afternoon? I've some business of my own which I'd very much like to attend to."

"Why, certainly," he answered instantly; so when I left the office at noon, I took the Elevated to the Grand Central Station and bought a ticket to Ossining. Once there, I went direct to the grey old prison and stated my errand to Mr. Jones, the sub-warden, whom I found in charge.

"I've come up from New York," I began, after giving him my card, "to see if you can identify

this man," and I handed him the photograph of Thompson.

He looked at it long and searchingly, seemingly for a time in doubt, but at last he shook his head.

"No, I don't believe I can," he said. "There's something familiar about the face, but I can't place it."

"How long have you been connected with the prison, Mr. Jones?" I asked.

"I began thirty years ago as guard. But what made you think I could identify this fellow?"

"We've rather imagined," I answered, "that his real name was Johnson and that he served a term here for robbery, beginning in 1885."

He looked at the photograph again, with a sudden flush of excitement in his face.

"I believe you're right," he said. "Let's look at Johnson's photo."

He consulted the index, then turned to one of the wall cases.

"Here he is," he said, opening a compartment and pointing to a photograph. "It's the same man, sure, only changed a lot. It would be easy to prove it. I suppose they took his Bertillon measurements at the morgue, and we've only to compare them with ours. They'd be the same, no matter how much he'd changed."

And he had changed, indeed! The Johnson of the prison photograph was, of course, smooth-shaven; his face was alert, intelligent; there was no scar upon the temple, nor did the features show that subtle bloating of long-continued dissipation. But it was the same—

undoubtedly it was the same. There was no need to apply any finer tests.

"I remember him now," said Jones, looking from one photograph to the other, "very well. He was a quiet, well-behaved chap—had been captain of a little tramp steamer, I believe. He had a perfect mania for cutting pieces out of newspapers and pasting them in a scrap-book. He spent all his leisure time that way. Oh, yes; I remember, too, he tried to escape, but his pal went back on him and left him layin' out yonder by the wall. His pal was a bad one, he was; he got away and I've often wondered what become of him. Here he is."

He swung open another compartment, and I found myself staring at Tremaine!

Not until I was quite near New York did I recover sufficiently from the effects of this discovery to heed the cry of the train-boy as he went through the coaches with the evening papers.

"All about th' Edgemere murder!" he was crying, and the name caught my ear.

"Edgemere," I repeated to myself. "Edgemere. I've heard that name somewhere."

Then in a flash I remembered; and in a moment more the whole story of the tragedy of the night before—the murder of Graham and the theft of Mrs. Delroy's necklace—lay before me. With what intensity of interest I read it can be easily imagined; I was shaken, nervous, horror-stricken. That there was some connection between this second tragedy and the one in suite fourteen I did not doubt; and I read and

re-read the details with the greatest care, in the effort to find where that connection lay.

But it was impossible to see how Tremaine could be implicated in the Edgemere mystery even in the least degree—his alibi was perfect. On the other hand, the evidence against young Drysdale seemed complete in every link. Certainly, none of the papers doubted his guilt, and they handled his past career and his family history with a minuteness and freedom which must have been most trying to his friends. Coroner Heffellower came in for the lion's share of praise—everyone agreed that he had conducted the case with rare skill and acumen. Of course, the *Record* had his photograph, as well as those of his wife and six children, and as I looked at his round face, I fancied him strutting back and forth in his saloon, inflated with pride, and listening approvingly to the constant ringing of the cash-register. It's an ill wind—but certainly there was no denying that he had handled the case adroitly.

Drysdale, it appeared, had been lodged in the jail at Babylon, and steadfastly refused to make any statement, or to explain his absence from the house. No reporters had been admitted to Edgemere—though that fact did not prevent two or three of them from writing minute descriptions of the condition of affairs there, and publishing interviews with the members of the family. Marvellous accounts were given of the exquisite beauty and immense value of the missing necklace, and the *Record* published a drawing of it "from a description by Tiffany."

We pulled into the station, and I took a car down

to my rooms, turning this latest enigma over and over in my mind, looking at it from every angle, trying in vain to discover some fact that would implicate Tremaine. At my door I paused a moment; then I crossed the hall and knocked at Tremaine's door. Perhaps Cecily had forgiven me, and in an evening's talk I ought surely to be able to find out something more . . .

But it was not Cecily, it was Tremaine himself who opened to me.

"Oh, Mr. Lester," he cried, with hand outstretched, "how are you? I wanted to see you—I've been listening for your step. You must join us here this evening."

"I shall be glad to," I said, returning his clasp, all my suspicions melting away, reduced to absurdity, at sight of him. "But why so particularly this evening?"

"Because we've planned a little celebration. Cecily is going away——"

"Going away?"

"Yes—back to St. Pierre to get my house in order—but I'll tell you at dinner—it's to be served here in an hour. You will come?"

"Certainly I will," I assured him, and hastened over to my room to dress.

He was awaiting me when I knocked an hour later; a table had been set with three places.

"Come in," he said. "Dinner will be here directly. I thought it safer to have the celebration here because—well," and he nodded significantly toward the inner room.

"Cecily?" I questioned.

"Yes—she takes it to heart more than you'd believe. But she'll get over it in a day or two."

"When does she leave?"

"In the morning early, by the fruit boat. And, by the way, I want you to go down with me to see her off. She'll appreciate it."

"Why, certainly—but isn't it rather sudden?"

"In a way, yes. You see, I've arranged for a committee from New York to go down to Martinique and look over the ground, and I want to take them before they have a chance to cool off. I've got to get my house there in order and engage some servants, for that will be our headquarters, and if Cecily doesn't leave by the boat to-morrow, she can't go for ten days. Ten days from now I'm going to have the committee ready to sail, and when I get them to Martinique, I'm going to give them a sample of Creole hospitality. I wish you could come," he added warmly. "I'd like to have you."

"There's nothing I'd like better," I said, suddenly conscious of how I had slandered him in my thoughts. "But I fear it isn't possible just now."

"Well, some day I shall have you there, and I warn you I shan't let you go in a hurry. Come in," he added, in response to a knock at the door.

Two waiters entered, and in a moment the dinner was served.

"That will do," said Tremaine, pressing a coin into the hand of each of them. "We'll attend to ourselves. Send up in an hour for the dishes. I thought that

was best," he added, as he closed the door after them. "We can talk freely now."

He stepped to the inner door.

"Cecily!" he called.

She appeared in a moment, with eyelids a little puffed and red, but on the whole in much better spirits than I had expected. She was arrayed in all her finery—she had put on every piece of jewelry, I think—and she paused in the doorway to throw me a courtesy. Tremaine took her hand and led her to a seat, with a grace worthy of the Grand Monarque.

"See the spoiled child!" he said, laughing across the table at her, a moment later. "She's been making herself miserable for nothing. In two weeks, we shall be together again at Fond-Corré."

She answered his laugh with a thin smile, and shot me a glance pregnant with meaning. I knew she meant that her prophecy had come true.

He brimmed her glass with wine.

"Drink that," he said. "To our meeting in two weeks."

"To our meeting in two weeks!" she repeated ironically, and drained the glass.

But in a few moments the mood passed and she became quite gay. Not till then did it occur to me that Tremaine had made no reference to the tragedy at Edgemere. Then I caught myself just in time, for I remembered suddenly that I was not supposed to know he had been there.

"So you have been successful?" I asked finally.

"Yes, I believe so. I've succeeded in interesting

ome capitalists. Richard Delroy—perhaps you know him?"

"No; only by reputation."

"He has helped me greatly."

"You got through, then, sooner than you expected?"

"Yes—I thought it would take a week, at least. Mr. Delroy had arranged that the conference should take place at his country house near Babylon. We finished the details yesterday, and," he added, after the faintest hesitation, "an extremely unfortunate event occurred there last night which made any further stay impossible—I dare say you saw an account of it in the evening papers?"

"Oh, yes; that murder and robbery. The evidence seems to point very strongly toward a young fellow named Drysdale."

"Very strongly," he agreed, nodding with just the right degree of concern, "although I'm hoping that he may be able to prove himself not guilty. An amiable young fellow—somewhat impulsive and headstrong—but let us not talk about it. It's too unpleasant. This evening, we must be gay."

There is no need for me to detail what we did talk about, since it in no way concerns this story; but I had never seen Tremaine to better advantage. He was the unexceptionable gentleman, the man of the world who had travelled far and tasted many things, a brilliant and witty talker—a personality, in a word, on the whole so fascinating and impressive that long before the evening was over I had dismissed as ridiculous my vague suspicions of an hour before.

The story that Godfrey had built up was, I reflected, wholly hypothetical, flimsy . . . the flimsiness which always attaches to circumstantial evidence. I knew how a jury, looking at Tremaine, would laugh at it. No lawyer would risk his reputation with such a case, no magistrate would allow it to proceed before him. Why, for all I knew, Tremaine could prove an alibi for the tragedy in suite fourteen as complete as that which Delroy had offered for him in the Edgemere mystery. Godfrey and I had been forging a chain of sand, imagining it steel! As for that prison photograph, I had been deceived by a chance resemblance.

"The boat starts from pier fifty-seven, North River, at the foot of West Twenty-seventh Street, at eight o'clock," were Tremaine's last words to me. "We shall look for you there."

Is there any virtue in dreams, I wonder? That night, while I slept, the tragedy in suite fourteen was re-enacted before me. I witnessed its every detail—I saw Tremaine snatch up the pipe and strike a heavy blow—then, suddenly, behind him, appeared a face dark with passion, a hand shot out, a pistol flashed, even as Tremaine tried to knock it aside, and Cecily looked down upon her victim with eyes blazing with hatred!

I was at the pier in good time, for, let me confess it, I was curious to see the details of this leave-taking. Cecily and Tremaine were there before me, the former leaning sadly against the rail while the latter directed the checking of some baggage.

I went directly to her.

"So here you are," I said, "ready to go back to that St. Pierre you love so much. Aren't you glad?"

"Oh, very glad," she answered, with a single listless glance at me. "I shall never come back to this horrible place."

"And Tremaine will join you in two weeks," I added.

This time she looked at me—a lightning flash!—a glance that brought back vividly my dream.

"Will he?" she asked between her teeth.

"Why," I questioned, in affected surprise, "don't you think he will?"

She drew in her breath with a quick gasp.

"What does it matter? I'm only a fille-de-couleur. I shall laugh and forget, like all the others," and, indeed, a strange unnatural excitement had come into her face.

I saw her eyes devouring Tremaine as he approached.

"Everything is arranged," he said cheerily, shaking hands with me. "Here are the checks, Cecily. Now take us down to your stateroom and do the honours."

"As you please, doudoux," she answered quietly, and led the way.

It was a very pleasant cabin, one of the best on board, and I saw that some of her personal belongings were already scattered about it. Against the hot-water pipe in one corner was hanging Fé-Fé's cage. A curtain had been tied about it to protect its tender occupant from the cold.

"I see you're taking Fé-Fé with you," I remarked.

"To be sure she is," said Tremaine. "She knows the snake would starve to death if she left it with me. But we must drink to a good voyage."

He rose and touched the electric button. Cecily followed him with eyes gleaming like two coals of fire. Looking at her, I felt a vague uneasiness—did she have concealed in the bosom of her gown that same revolver—was she only waiting a favourable moment . . .

"The first toast is yours, Mr. Lester," said Tremaine, as he filled the glasses.

"To Cecily!" I cried. "Her health, long life, and happiness!"

"Thank you, chè," she said simply, and very gravely, and we drank it.

Just then a bell sounded loudly from the deck and a voice shouting commands.

"Come, we must be going," said Tremaine, rising hastily. "That's the shore bell."

I passed out first, and for an instant held my breath, expecting I know not what—a dull report—a scream . . . But in a moment they came out together. Tremaine and I made a rush for the gang-plank, while Cecily again took up her station against the rail. We waved to her and waved again, shouting good-byes, as the last rope was cast loose, and the steamer began to move away from the dock.

She waved back at us and kissed her hands, looking very beautiful.

Then suddenly her face changed; she swayed and caught at the rail for support.

"She's going to faint, pardieu!" said Tremaine.

But she did not faint; instead she made a funnel of her hands and shouted a last message back at us.

Tremaine nodded as though he understood and waved his hand

"Did you catch what she said?" he asked.

"No, not a word of it. That tug over there whistled just then."

"I caught the word '*lit.*' She probably wants to know how many she'll have to get ready—but no matter," and he turned to me with an expressive little shrug.

"Why? Isn't the committee really going to Martinique?"

"Oh, a couple of engineers are going to look over the ground and report."

"And you"

"I shall stay here." He waved his handkerchief again at the receding boat, then passed it across his forehead. "That takes a big load off my mind, Mr. Lester, I tell you, to get her safely off and be alive to tell the tale. I rather expected her to stick a knife into me last night. I made a great mistake in bringing her with me."

"But I thought you said——"

"Oh, they do laugh and forget in time; but just at first they naturally feel badly. Now, before the voyage is over, I dare say Cecily will have another doudoux—some handsome Creole returning home, perhaps. She's a magnificent woman, just the same," he added.

"That she is," I agreed, and threw a last look down the river.

The boat was almost hidden by the morning mist; in a moment more it had quite disappeared, bearing Cecily to death, a fortnight later, in the shadow of Pelée. And I doubt if I shall ever know another woman like her.

CHAPTER V

Counsel for the Defence

WHEN I opened the office door, twenty minutes later, I was surprised to find Godfrey just within, in close conference with Mr. Royce.

"Here he is!" he cried. "No, no; don't take off your coat; don't even take off your hat! Come along; it's a mighty close thing now," and he caught me by the arm.

"It's all right, Lester," said our junior, seeing my astonished countenance. "Mr. Godfrey will explain on the way out."

That was enough; I needed no second bidding, and ran after Godfrey to the elevator. At the curb a cab was waiting, and we jumped into it.

"James Slip," called Godfrey, and in an instant we were off.

The driver seemed to realise the need of haste, for we bumped over the paving-stones at a prodigious rate, threading the dirty streets of the Italian and Jewish quarters, and finally pulling up with a whirl in the shadow of Brooklyn bridge.

"Come on!" cried Godfrey, and we crossed the ferry-house at a jump, slammed our tickets into the chopper, and sprang aboard the boat just as it was casting loose.

"That was a close shave," said Godfrey, sinking into the [illegible] and taking off his hat.

I sat down beside him and mopped away the perspiration. I had need of all my breath for a moment, but at last I managed to blurt out a question.

"What's it all about?"

"Well," began Godfrey, putting on his hat again and looking at me with a quizzical smile, "in the first place, the eminent and widely known firm of Graham & Royce has been engaged to defend one John Tolbert Drysdale, now under arrest charged with murder and robbery. You are on your way to Babylon, Long Island, to look over the ground, have a talk with your client, and get the case ready."

"So!" I nodded; "yes, I read of the case in last night's papers. But Mr. Drysdale has never, I think, been a client of ours; how did he happen to choose us?"

"He didn't; I chose you. I wanted him to have the best in the market."

"Thanks," I said, colouring a little. "But how did the office come to take the case? We're always rather shy of criminal cases, you know."

"Yes, I know you are. But I chinned your junior a bit."

"That explains it!" I said, laughing. "Of course we'll do our best for him."

"You'll acquit him," said Godfrey, with conviction. "I was at Boston yesterday, or I'd have gone down to Babylon at once and taken you with me."

"Then I shouldn't have got to say good-bye to Cecil."

"To whom?"

"To Cecily—Tremaine's sweetheart, you know. He shipped her back to Martinique this morning."

"Oh, *did* he?" and my companion's eyes narrowed suddenly. "Why was that?"

I related briefly the incidents of the preceding evening and of the morning.

"Godfrey," I added impulsively, "if you knew Tremaine personally, I think you'd realise what a poor case we've got against him. Why, it's no case at all! Theorising's all very well, but what a jury wants is evidence—plain, straight-out direct evidence, and we haven't enough of that to build a cobweb. I thought I'd found some yesterday afternoon, but it was all the effect of self-induced hypnosis," and I told him of my visit to Sing-Sing.

He listened with intent face.

"I'm not so sure it was hypnosis," he said, when I had finished. "At least, I'll have a look at those photographs myself before I accept that theory. In fact, I rather think it's Tremaine who has hypnotised you, not I."

"I don't believe he's guilty," I repeated.

"Then who is?"

"Cecily!" I said bluntly. "I believe she's the one who killed Thompson, anyway."

"Where's your evidence?"

"I haven't any," I said helplessly; "only a kind of intuition."

"Well, I've the same kind of intuition it was Tremaine."

"But we haven't any evidence against him, either; not a shred of real, direct, convincing evidence."

"Perhaps not," he agreed; "but we're going to get it—enough to convict him and some to spare."

"Convict him of what?"

"Of two murders and one robbery."

"Then you believe he's implicated in this Edgemere affair?"

"I'm sure of it."

"But there isn't a shred of evidence against him," I protested again, coming back to my old objection; really Godfrey was allowing his prejudices to carry him too far.

"Not a shred, apparently," he assented readily.

"Well, then, how——"

"Here's the landing," he interrupted. "We can talk it over on the train."

We left the boat and hastened across to the station. The train was waiting the word to start, and was in motion a moment after we stepped aboard. There were not many passengers, for the morning travel is toward the city, not from it; and we had no difficulty in finding a seat where we could talk without fear of being overheard.

"Now," began Godfrey, "as you say, there isn't a shred of evidence, apparently, against Tremaine. How about your client?"

"Against Drysdale," I answered, "the evidence seems to be unusually complete."

"You might have used a stronger phrase. It's not only complete, it's consummately perfect. Not a link is missing. He was on the spot; his revolver is found near by with blood on it; a button from his coat is in the dead man's hand; when he returns to the house,

he is visibly disturbed; at the moment of his arrest, he was preparing to escape; he refuses to explain where he was at the time the crime was committed; he's involved in steel speculation and presumably needs ready money."

"Well?"

"Well," said Godfrey earnestly, "that very perfection is its greatest weakness. It's *too* perfect. Any one of those things might have happened; perhaps any two of them; but that they should all have happened outrages the law of probabilities. That every link of the chain is complete means that it has been artificially produced, like a stage storm, where the lightning flashes at just the right instant. The fellow who arranged it wanted to be too sure—he overleaped himself."

"That may all be true," I said slowly, after a moment, "but it would be worse than folly to use that argument with a jury. To say that a man isn't guilty because the evidence against him appears to be conclusive——"

"We're not going to use it to a jury; we're using it between ourselves, in the effort to find a working hypothesis. And here's another argument which would carry no weight with a jury, yet which with me, personally, is conclusive: I know Jack Drysdale; I've known him for a long time; and I know that it's utterly impossible that he should have committed such a crime. He's not a very original fellow; not at all a genius; he's never done anything, perhaps, which either of us would think really worth doing; but he's kind, and honest, and gentle, and honourable. I re-

peat that a crime like this is as far beyond his horizon as it is beyond yours—farther, I'm sure, than it is beyond mine; and yet, I don't believe you'd think me guilty, no matter what the evidence against me seemed to be."

"I shouldn't," I said; "but if Drysdale isn't guilty, who is?"

"If Drysdale isn't, there's only one other person who can be—that's Tremaine. As I'm sure Drysdale's not guilty, I'm correspondingly sure that Tremaine is."

"But then," I objected, "you've just said that there's no evidence against him."

"I said apparently there wasn't."

"And Delroy says he didn't leave the house."

"Delroy must be mistaken—*must* be, mind you! And while there isn't any direct evidence, there's some pretty good indirect. We know that Tremaine is a criminal and, therefore, capable of this crime; we suspect that he needs money, and the necklace would place him out of need for a long time to come; we know that he was within reach of the spot where the murder was committed, if he could get away from Delroy for an hour or so. In other words, we have a motive and the physical possibility of guilt. I may add that I think we shall find he had some reason to injure Drysdale—I'm sure we shall, in fact."

"But the button—the pistol—Drysdale's unexplained absence?"

"Those points can only be cleared up by a personal investigation of the premises. That's why we're going to Edgemere."

"Godfrey," I said, "there seems to me to be one great objection to your theory that Tremaine killed Thompson. If Miss Croydon saw him do it, would she consent to associate with him? Wouldn't her very knowledge of his crime give her a greater hold on him than he has on her sister?"

He paused to turn this over.

"Yes," he admitted at last; "it would; but a woman might not think of that."

"A desperate woman would think of everything," I said; "and if your theory is right, both she and her sister must be very desperate."

He nodded without answering, and sat staring before him, his brows knitted in perplexity.

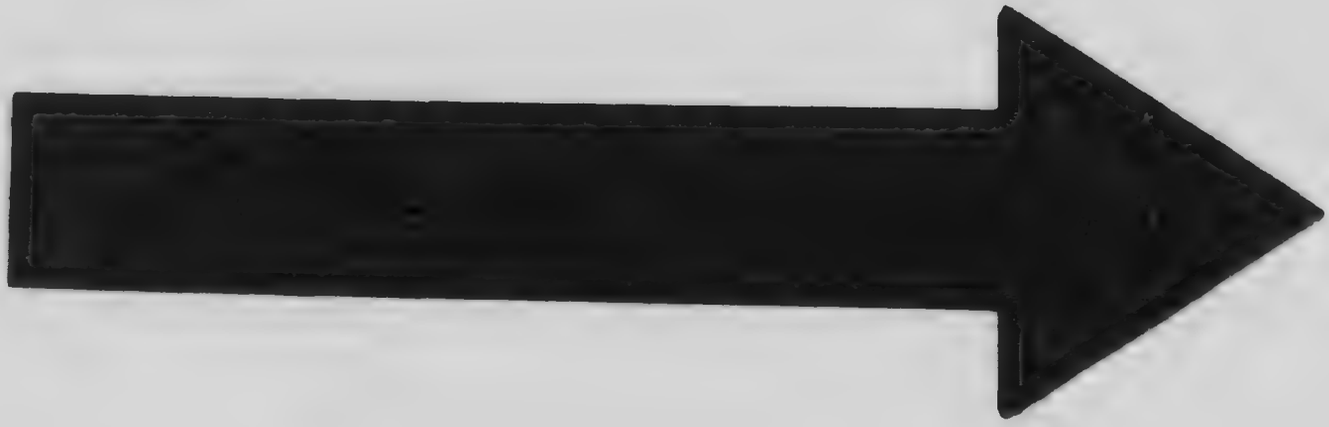
There was one conclusive objection I might have urged, had I known of it—but I was not yet possessed of the story of the house-party. If Tremaine was the husband of Mrs. Delroy, how could he propose marriage to her sister? That was a rock, as yet unseen by us, which loomed ahead—which we could not avoid—upon which our theory must inevitably be dashed to pieces.

The train flashed past two or three big hotels, then the brakes were applied.

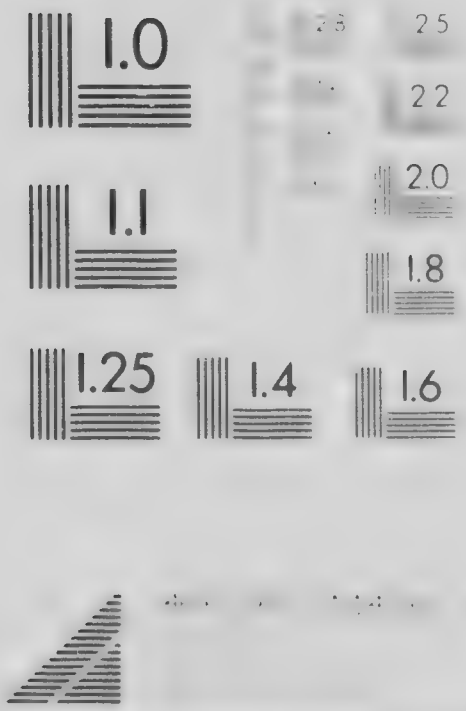
"Here's Babylon," said Godfrey, rousing himself from the profound revery into which my question had thrown him. "We'll look in upon the prisoner, first, and cheer him up a bit."

The jail was only a short distance from the station, and a five minutes' walk brought us to it.

"We're here in behalf of Mr. Drysdale," Godfrey explained to the jailer. "This is Mr. Lester, of Gra-



MICROCOPY RESOLUTION TEST CHART



ham & Royce, of New York, who have been retained to defend him. I suppose we may see him?"

"I'll take in your cards," he said, after looking us over. "If Mr. Drysdale wants to see you, it's all right, but you'll be the first ones."

He disappeared into an inner room; we heard the rattling of keys and the clanging of an iron door. He was back again in a moment.

"Step this way, gentlemen," he said.

Drysdale was sitting on the bunk in his little cell. He came forward with hand outstretched as soon as he saw Godfrey.

"This is mighty kind of you, Jim," he said.

"I'll have to lock you in, gentlemen," broke in the jailer. "How soon must I come for you?"

"Say twenty minutes," answered Godfrey, looking at his watch. Then he turned back to us as the jailer's steps died away down the corridor. "Jack," he said, "this is Mr. Lester, of Graham & Royce, who've been retained to look after your case."

"My case? Who retained them?"

"I did. I scarcely supposed you were going to let yourself be convicted without lifting a finger."

Drysdale smiled bitterly.

"They won't convict me. Just the same, I'm glad to see you, Mr. Lester," and he held out his hand. "I shall, of course, need some legal advice."

"I'm glad you admit that much!" retorted Godfrey, with sarcasm. "I understand that you haven't condescended as yet to prove an alibi."

"No," answered the prisoner quietly. "The fact is, I can't prove an alibi."

"You can't?" and Godfrey's face paled a little.

"No; when I left the house that night, I went down to the pier and had a little talk with Graham; then I—I wandered around the grounds until the storm came up, when I went back to the house and up to my room. Nobody saw me; I spoke to nobody after I left Graham, until I returned to the house. There's only my own word for it. What was the use of telling the police a story like that?"

"No use at all," agreed Godfrey hastily. "I'm glad you didn't tell it. But what on earth possessed you to behave in such a crazy fashion?"

"That," answered Drysdale, still more quietly, "is one question which I must absolutely refuse to answer."

CHAPTER VI

Innocent or Guilty?

WE sat looking at him a moment in silence. It was evident that he was suffering some exquisite mental anguish, though I suspected, somehow, that it was not because of his imprisonment. There was something deeper than that; something that touched him more closely . . .

"Oh, come, Jack," protested Godfrey, at last, "this is no time to put on the high and mighty. You don't seem to realise what an exceedingly serious position you're in."

"I know one thing, Godfrey," returned Drysdale, with a forced smile, "and that is that I didn't kill Graham nor steal the necklace. So I know they can't convict me."

"I wouldn't be too sure of it; things like that happen occasionally. How did Graham get hold of that button off your ram-coat?"

"I'm sure I don't know."

"You wore the coat that evening?"

"Yes."

"And the button was on it?"

"Yes—I'd have missed it, if it hadn't been. Besides, I buttoned the coat up when I started back to the house."

Godfrey's face flushed and his eyes began to glisten.

"You're sure, then, that it was on the coat when you returned to the house?"

"Why, yes," answered Drysdale, looking at him in some astonishment, "reasonably sure."

Godfrey fell a moment silent; then he shook his head impatiently.

"There's another thing," he said. "How did your pistol get out there in that boat?"

"That's another puzzler."

"Now see here, Jack," continued Godfrey seriously, "there's one thing certain—either you killed Graham or Tremaine did."

"Tremaine?" repeated the prisoner, with tightening lips.

"Yes. Do you know of any evidence against him?"

Drysdale paused a moment, his brows knitted.

"No," he answered positively, at last. "I don't see how Tremaine could possibly have done it."

"Why not?"

"Because he didn't leave the house, so Delroy says. I know he was there when I went out, and when I came back I saw him sitting by his lighted window, writing apparently."

"Ah!" Then after a moment, "Did you keep that journal you promised to keep?"

"Yes; you'll find it in my room—that is— "

He stopped suddenly and coloured.

"Well? Out with it."

"I just happened to think that perhaps that damned fool of a coroner's got it. See here, Jim, if you find it I want you to promise me one thing—

that you won't read it—not yet—it won't help you a bit."

"I'm not so sure of that," retorted Godfrey grimly. "Why don't you want me to read it?"

"The fact is," Drysdale answered, colouring still more, "that after I got started, I—I forgot I was writing it for you——"

"I see," said Godfrey drily, as the other paused. "I'll promise you this, Jack—I won't read it unless I find that I can't clear you any other way."

Drysdale heaved a sigh of relief.

"That's all I want," he said. "Afterwards, perhaps, I won't mind; but just now——"

His voice trailed off, his lips trembled.

"And you've nothing more to tell us?"

"Not a thing."

"Very well; we'll go out and have a look about the place. We'll come in again this afternoon. We're going to clear you," he added confidently.

We heard the jailer's footsteps approaching along the corridor.

"I don't doubt it," said Drysdale, with a puzzling listlessness. "It's very good of you both to take all this trouble."

The jailer opened the door and we passed out.

"Do you know when the inquest will be?" Godfrey asked, as we stepped through together into the outer room.

"Yes, sir; t'-morrer mornin'. They'd have had it today, but Coroner Heffelbower hopes t' find th' necklace by t'-morrer."

"Oh! so they haven't found it, then?"

"No, sir; they searched Drysdale's room, but it wasn't there. Now they're tryin' t' figger out where he hid it."

"Well," observed Godfrey, "they'll have to figure a long time, because he didn't hide it anywhere."

"Mebbe not, sir," retorted the jailer, with a sceptical smile. "But appearances are dead agin him. Why, even his girl thinks he did it."

"How do you know that?" demanded Godfrey quickly.

"When Heffelbower was bringin' him out o' th' house, they met her in th' hall, an' she asked Drysdale what he wanted t' do it fer, why he couldn't a-waited a while. That's purty good evidence, *I* think."

Godfrey had listened with a face hard as steel. He turned away without answering, and as we went down the street together, I saw that this new development puzzled and worried him sorely. That Miss Croydon should think Drysdale guilty, even for an instant, was inconceivable!

We made our way to the nearest hotel and engaged a trap, and while it was getting ready, ordered a light lunch. Godfrey ate in thoughtful silence; as for me, I confess that I saw little ground for that conviction he had expressed so confidently, that we could prove our client's innocence. I was forced to admit that, to look at Drysdale, no one would believe him capable of such a crime; but then, for that matter, to look at Tremaine, who would believe him capable of it? Put the two men before a jury, and Tremaine would come off victor every time. It becomes instinctive, in time, for a lawyer to try to look at his cases with an

average jury's eyes—he must see them as those twelve men in the box will see them—and applying that method now, it was very evident to me that the chance of clearing our client was very slim indeed.

The trap came around to the door and in a moment we were off along the sandy road. The day was warm and bright, the air had the sharp salt smell of the ocean, trees and bushes were starting into life under the touch of spring. But Godfrey did not seem to notice any of these things. He kept his eyes straight ahead and his face was very stern. No doubt he was finding the problem much more difficult than he had thought.

But at last we swung down before the door at Edgemere. A man ran out to hold our horse. We asked for Mr. Delroy, and a servant who had been stationed in the vestibule took in our cards. He returned immediately and conducted us to the library. Delroy came forward to meet us, our cards in his hand, a curious look of doubt and perplexity upon his countenance.

"My dear Godfrey," he began, "I didn't like to refuse to see you, and yet I've declined to talk to reporters——."

"You're not talking to one now, Mr. Delroy," broke in my companion. "I've come down purely in Drysdale's behalf. Of course, I'll write up the story, if I succeed in getting him off, but I'll not use anything I learn here in that way."

"Oh, that's all right, then," and Delroy breathed a sigh of relief. "Glad to see you. And you, too, Mr. Leslie."

"Mr. Lester is Drysdale's counsel," explained my companion. "Between us, we're going to see that he's cleared of this ridiculous charge."

"Yes, I hope you will. Sit down, won't you? Ridiculous, that's the word for it; and yet," he added, passing his hand before his eyes in a dazed way, "there are so many points of evidence which seem unexplainable that I've grown giddy thinking about them. It's such a terrible thing—my wife is quite prostrated—even a little delirious at times; her sister is almost ill—we've all been terribly upset."

"No doubt," nodded Godfrey, his face curiously intent. "We're not going to trouble you much now, Mr. Delroy; the only thing I should like you to do is to give us an account of all that happened that evening. I hope you will do that."

"Yes, I'll be glad to do that," and he proceeded to tell in detail the story the reader already knows.

"There's one thing," said Godfrey, when it was ended. "Is it true that Miss Croydon seemed to believe Drysdale guilty?"

"Yes," answered Delroy; "for an instant she did; but she explained to me afterwards that she thought it was Tremaine who had been killed."

Godfrey's eyes blazed with sudden interest.

"Tremaine! Then there's been ill-feeling between them?"

"Yes—at least on Drysdale's part. He'd conceived some absurd suspicions of Tremaine—told me I'd done wrong in inviting him here—acted rather nastily about it, in fact."

"Thank you," said Godfrey quietly, though his eyes

were still shining. "Now I should like your permission to look over the grounds and to examine the rooms which Drysdale and Tremaine occupied."

"Certainly," and Delroy touched the bell. "Thomas," he said, to the servant who entered, "you will take these gentlemen wherever they wish to go and answer any questions they may ask you."

We went first to the boathouse and pier and looked over the scene of the tragedy. I was struck, at once, by the change in Godfrey's demeanour; he no longer seemed either perplexed or worried; his face was shining with triumph. Evidently he had discovered a way out of the labyrinth.

To the boathouse he gave a particularly careful scrutiny, searching in every corner, apparently for some minute object which he failed to find. Out on the pier, again, he stood looking up and down with thoughtful face.

"Pshaw!" he said suddenly. "I might have known I was just wasting my time in there. Come this way, Lester."

He hurried back through the boathouse and down to the beach. Along the edge of it he walked, scrutinising every inch of the sand. Suddenly he stooped with a little cry of triumph and caught up a small bottle. It was quite empty. He removed the cork, sniffed it, and replaced it quickly.

"Do you mean to say, Godfrey," I demanded in astonishment, "that you have been looking for that bottle?"

"It's precisely what I've been looking for," he returned exultantly. "And I've learned one thing—

never to mistrust a logical deduction. Now let's go back to the house. And, Thomas," he added to our guide, "take us back by the way that will bring us opposite the room occupied by Mr. Tremaine."

"All right, sir," said Thomas. "His room was right next to Mr. Drysdale's in th' east wing—there it is now, sir—th' third and fourth windows from th' end."

"And the fifth and sixth windows belong to Mr. Drysdale's room?"

"Yes, sir."

A sort of balcony ran along the entire wing just beneath the windows, half-covered with creeping vines, which in summer, no doubt, completely draped it. Godfrey examined it with shining eyes. Then he walked straight to the end of the building.

"Now, Lester," he said, "I'm going to make a prediction. I predict that we'll find the wall at the corner freshly scratched in more than one place. Ah, now, see there."

The marks were plain enough and the cluster of heavy vines which ran up here against the house also showed signs of abrasion.

"What would you say those marks meant, Lester?" Godfrey asked.

"I should say," I answered, readily enough, "that someone had recently climbed up to the balcony or down from it."

"Both ways, Lester: both up and down! Oh, this is much simpler than I'd expected! Now take us up to the rooms, Thomas."

But in the vestibule he paused.

"Is that the rack where the coats hang, Thomas?" he asked.

"Yes, sir."

"And where Mr. Drysdale hung his coat that night?"

"Yes, sir."

"Did you happen to notice, Thomas, when he came in, whether or not the top button of his rain-coat was missing?"

"Yes, sir," answered Thomas slowly; "I thought about it afterwards, and it's mighty funny, sir, but I'd swear he had his coat buttoned up tight around his throat. How could he a-done that if th' top button wasn't there?"

"How, indeed?" mused Godfrey, gazing at the rack with eyes intent.

Then they softened, brightened; his face broke into a smile.

"Of course," he said, half to himself; "how dense of me not to have thought of it! Now, Thomas, we'll go upstairs."

CHAPTER VII

The Key to the Mystery

THOMAS led the way through the hall and up the stair.

"Which room will you look at first, sir?" he asked.

"Let us see Mr. Tremaine's room first."

"Very well, sir," said Thomas, and opened a door and stood aside to let us pass.

There was nothing at all extraordinary about the room. It was large, well-lighted, well-ventilated, well-furnished—just the sort of bedroom one would naturally expect to find in a luxurious country-house.

Godfrey cast a glance about it, then he went to one of the windows, opened it, and stepped out upon the balcony. He walked along the balcony to the end where the heavy creepers were, took a look at them, and finally came back to the window.

"That's all," he said, as he stepped through into the room. "Of course, I didn't expect to find anything here—our friend is much too clever to be caught napping that way. Thomas, I suppose this table is just where it was when Mr. Tremaine had the room?"

"Yes, sir."

Godfrey sat down at it, measuring the distance from it to the window.

"Lester," he said, "I wish you'd go out and come up the walk and see if you can see me sitting here."

I ran down the stairs and did as he directed, but could catch not a glimpse of him.

"Well?" he called down, coming to the open window.

"I can't see you at all," I said.

"I thought so. Come up again."

He was sitting again at the table when I opened the door.

"Now, take a look at it, Lester," he said. "You'll see that the table is so far away from the window that it's quite impossible for anyone on the ground outside to see the person sitting at it. Yet Drysdale stated distinctly that he saw Tremaine sitting at the table writing when he came back from that mysterious walk. What would you argue from that?"

"That Tremaine had moved the table nearer to the window."

"And why should he do that?"

"To get a better light, perhaps," I ventured.

"He might have done it, in the daytime, to get a better light, but at night he would get a much worse one over there by the window than here. The lights, you'll observe, hang from the centre of the ceiling."

"Then he did it," I said, "in order that he might be seen from outside."

"That's it: not only that he might be seen, but that Drysdale might see him. I wonder if this is the kind of paper he wrote on."

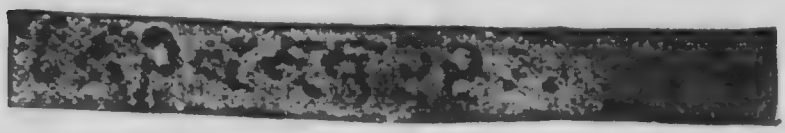
"We keep a supply of it in all th' guest rooms, sir," volunteered Fiona.

Godfrey took it up and looked at it. It was a plain white linen of good quality, with the word "Edge

mere" embossed in blue at the top. There were also on the table pens, an inkstand, and two or three blotters. He turned the blotters over, but only one of them showed any sign of having been used, and the marks on it were very faint—yet they seemed to interest Godfrey. He bent over them with puzzled face; then he got out a little magnifying glass and studied them again.

"Lester," he said, at last, "I wish you'd take a look at this," and he pushed the blotter and glass toward me. "What do you make of it?"

I gazed through the glass at the marks, but for a moment could make nothing of them. Then they resolved themselves into a string of letters marching backward, fairly distinct at one end but fading away to nothingness at the other, thus—



"Somebody seems to have been scribbling a lot of disconnected letters on a piece of paper," I said, at last. "I can't make out any words. The letters seem to be mostly B's and G's—yes, and here's an I."

"Thomas," said Godfrey, "will you go down and ask Mr. Delroy if he has a sample of Mr. Tremaine's handwriting, and, if so, if he will let us see it for a moment."

Thomas went out instantly and I looked at Godfrey in surprise.

"You think those marks have some value?" I asked.

Godfrey drummed absently on the table and stared out of the window.

"I don't know," he answered; "but in an investigation of this kind, no point is too small to be important. We've got to examine everything, weigh everything, pile up every little atom of evidence, if we expect to tip the scale in our direction. It's very probable that Tremaine never made these marks at all; even if he did, they probably have no significance. But, in any event, it won't do any harm to make sure; and, besides, I'd like to see a sample of his handwriting, just for its own sake—the handwriting of a man like that ought to be interesting. Ah, here is Thomas."

"Here's a letter, sir," said Thomas.

Godfrey opened it and glanced at the contents.

"He's a good penman," he said; "see, Lester," and he handed me the sheet; "but it's quite a different hand from the one on the blotter—much broader and more masculine—just such a hand as one would naturally expect a man like Tremaine to write."

He examined it again for a moment, then folded it up, and handed it back to Thomas.

"Perhaps Mr. Delroy will want it again," he said. "Now, let us see Mr. Drysdale's room."

As he got up from the table, I noticed that he still held the blotter in his hand, and I saw him place it carefully in an inner pocket. After all, then, he *did* attach some importance to it.

The room which had been occupied by Drysdale was the counterpart of Tremaine's, but it was in great disorder. An open trunk stood in the middle of the floor, with clothing strewn about it; the bed had not been made . . .

"We was ordered not t' do anything toward settin'

this room to rights," explained Thomas apologetically, "till the coroner sent us word we might. He ain't sent no word yet."

It was evident that Drysdale had been packing very hastily when he was interrupted by the arrival of the officers. The clothing which was in the trunk had been crammed in carelessly—though, of course, that might have been done by the coroner, after searching it.

"Drysdale evidently didn't spend much time in bed that night," observed Godfrey, and indicated a pile of cigarette stubs heaped high on an ash-tray on the table. "He must have had some knotty problem to wrestle with to need so many."

He walked slowly about the room, looking at everything keenly, but touching nothing; he stood gazing at the bed for a long time. Then he turned again to the table.

"Here's the diary," he said, picking up a little book which lay there. "So Heffelbower didn't get it. Well, I guess I'd better see that he doesn't have another chance."

He weighed it in his hand, and I could see how it tempted him—perhaps here lay the very key which he had been seeking in vain! But in a moment he slipped it unopened into his pocket.

"A man is a fool to make promises," he observed, with a wry smile, and sat down at the table. "Hello, what's this?" he added suddenly, and, stooping, he fished from the waste-basket beside him the fragments of a cane.

It was a cane certainly of at least ordinary strength.

and yet it had been broken into half a dozen pieces, and hurled into the basket.

Whistling softly to himself, Godfrey surveyed it for a moment: then he bent over the basket and examined the remainder of its contents, piece by piece. There were scraps of letters, a torn envelope, a crumpled sheet of paper . . .

He sprang to his feet with a cry of triumph and waved it in the air.

"I've found it!" he cried, his face beaming. "I've found it, Lester!"

"Found what?" I questioned, more and more astonished, for Godfrey was usually master of his emotions.

"Ah, Lester," he continued more calmly, as he smoothed it out carefully on the table, "this takes a lot of conceit out of me. Had I been really clever, I'd have deduced the existence of this message long before I entered the room. As it is, it's luck—pure luck! I'm glad to win on any terms, but I'd rather win by scientific deduction. C. Auguste Dupin would have come straight upstairs, walked straight to that basket, and selected unerringly this sheet of paper—he would have known that it was there: while I—well, one can only do one's best, and this point was a little too fine for me. Take a look at it."

It was a sheet of the ordinary Edgemere note paper. Across it, two lines were written:

> Be at the pergola at nine
> If I am late, wait for me.
>
> G.

"Well," I faltered: "well——"

"Oh, don't you see, Lester, it's the key to the whole problem. It's the light we've been looking for—with our eyes shut! And to think that instead of coming straight here for it, I should have stumbled about in the dark for so long. It's the only possible explanation, and yet I didn't think of it. It was inevitable from the first, and yet I couldn't see it. It disgusts me with myself—it's what I get for being so cocked up over finding that bottle down there. Even after I saw that blotter, I didn't guess it!"

He had taken out a card, and as he spoke he wrote a rapid sentence on it.

"Here," he said to Thomas, "take this to Miss Croydon at once, please."

PART V

DAY!

[illegible]

CHAPTER I

What Happened in Suite Fourteen

I WAS conscious, in a dim way, that the end was at hand, that we were about to penetrate the mystery. Indeed, I already had a vague inkling of the truth—too vague to be put into words, too obscure to be discerned clearly. I was trembling with eagerness; I endeavoured to string upon a common thread the bits of evidence which had seemed to Godfrey so important—the bottle, the scratches on the wall, the coat-rack, the broken cane, the note; but for the life of me I could see no connection between them. Yet I knew there must be, or Godfrey would not now be walking up and down the room with a face so beaming, so triumphant . . .

"Miss Croydon will see you at once, sir," announced Thomas from the threshold, and we followed him to the farther end of the corridor, where he tapped at a door. A voice bade us enter.

She was standing by a window, looking out across the waters of the bay, and she did not turn for an instant—not, indeed, until Godfrey had closed the door carefully behind him. I have seen few women more regal, more magnificent, yet there was about her—in her face, in the droop of her figure—such an air of utter misery, of exquisite suffering, that, after the first moment, one forgot to admire her in the desire to be of service.

"You wished to see me?" she asked, in a low voice.

"Yes, Miss Croydon," replied Godfrey, more gently perhaps than he had intended to speak. "This is Mr. Lester," he added, "who has been engaged to defend Mr. Drysdale."

She acknowledged the introduction with the faintest of bows.

"I hope Mr. Lester will be successful," she said, in the coldest of tones. One would have thought her a mere chance acquaintance of my client.

I saw Godfrey looking at her with searching eyes, and his face hardened.

"We mean to be successful," he said curtly. "You may as well ask us to sit down, Miss Croydon, because our business here will take some time and I am sure it will tire you to stand."

She raised her eyebrows with a little gesture of astonished disdain.

"Really," she began; then her eyes met his, burning with meaning. "Oh, very well," she said faintly, and sank into the chair nearest her.

I felt my cheeks flush with indignation at Godfrey's manner; surely this woman had enough to bear already! I opened my lips to protest, but he silenced me with a glance.

"Now, Miss Croydon," he continued, in the same coldly imperative tone, "I intend to speak to you bluntly and directly. We have beaten about the bush too long already. I see that you are not inclined to deal frankly with us—you have not been frank with us from the first—you have sought to blind us, to throw us off the track. Therefore I shall tell you

what we already know, in order that you may realise how useless it is for you to try to hold us off. We're going to see that the guilty man is punished, not for this crime alone, but also for that other one at the Marathon, of which you were the only witness. You shall not be permitted to keep him from justice a day longer.'

She raised her head and looked at him, her face white as marble and as immobile; but she did not speak. She grew livid and more livid as he continued, watching him with starting eyes, and at one moment I thought she would collapse; but I did not know her strength of will.

"In the first place," went on Godfrey evenly, never removing his eyes from hers, "we know that this man Tremaine inveigled your sister into a school-girl elopement and marriage; she was rescued from him; she thought him dead; she married Delroy; came to New York; Tremaine followed her and attempted the extortion of blackmail; you met him at the Marathon; while you were talking, Thompson interfered and Tremaine killed him, escaping before the officers arrived. You did not know Thompson, but you saw Simmonds and me take out his pocket-book; you heard me read a line or two from one of a packet of clippings we found there, and while we were in the bedroom, you took those clippings from the body and hid them under the edge of the carpet——"

She breathed a long sigh and sat erect again.

"Ah," she said, with a little smile, "I was beginning to fear you, all that seemed so supernatural. But now I see where your information came from."

"It is correct, then?" asked Godfrey, a gleam of triumph flashing across his face.

She glanced at him in surprise.

"Oh, I understand; it was merely theorising. Well, it was very cleverly done, Mr. Godfrey."

"And it is correct?" he persisted.

She hesitated yet a moment, but there was no denying the importunity of his gaze.

"Yes," she answered; "yes."

Godfrey leaned back in his chair with a long sigh of relief. He had won the battle.

"Miss Croydon," he said, "I'm going to reward you for your frankness by telling you something which I had intended to keep secret a while longer, just to punish you. Your sister never was the wife of Tremaine and has nothing whatever to fear from him: he has no hold on her at all. She has never been anybody's wife but Mr. Delroy's."

She was staring at him with widely opened eyes, her hands clasped above her heart

"Oh, if it were really so!" she cried. "If it were really so!"

"It *is* so," repeated Godfrey, and took a little yellow envelope from his pocket. "Read this," and he unfolded a sheet of paper and held it toward her.

She took it with trembling hand and read the message written upon it; but seemingly without understanding it.

"It is a cable," he explained, "from the *Record's* correspondent at Dieppe. Your pardon, Lester," he added with a [illegible]. "I forgot to show it to

you on the trip out. Please read it aloud, Miss Croydon."

"'The widow of Victor Charente,'" she read in a low voice, "'died here February 21, 1901. Had never married again.'" She looked up, her brows still knitted. "Well?" she asked.

"Well," said Godfrey, "Victor Charente is the real name of Tremaine. He married that girl many years before he met your sister. She was his legal wife. Your sister never was. She was never the legal wife of anyone except Richard Delroy."

She understood now, and the glad tears burst forth unrestrainable. Indeed, she made no effort to restrain them, but only rocked back and forth, pressing the message against her heart.

"Thank God!" she sobbed. "Thank God!" and then she started up from her chair. "I must tell her," she said, "at once. If you knew how she has suffered! She must not be left in that cruel position an instant longer."

"Very well," agreed Godfrey. "We will wait for you here."

She disappeared through a door at the farther end of the room, but in a moment came softly back again.

"She is asleep," she said. "I will wait until she wakes. What a joyful awaking it will be!" and she sat down again. She wiped away the tears, but her eyes were still shining. Godfrey gazed at her with a face full of emotion.

"Now, Miss Croydon," he began, "you've told me that my theory [illegible] three or four

points I should like you to help me clear up, if you will."

"I shall be glad to if I can," she answered, and smiled at him, her eyes brimming again. "You've lifted such a load from me, Mr. Godfrey, that I'd do almost anything to show my gratitude."

Why, looking at her, did his face change—soften, harden? Why did his hands tremble so? It was over in an instant; yet I had caught a glimpse of his secret, I understood . . .

"It was nothing," he said; "I was glad to do it—I was deeply pleased when that message came this morning."

"You've been kinder to me than I deserved," she said; and I more than half agreed with her. How, with his eyes before her, could she fail to understand? Perhaps she did understand—I was never sure.

"In the first place, then, Miss Croydon," he went on, in a different tone, "how did your father succeed in getting your sister away from Tremaine?"

"They had gone to Paris," she answered, "and in two or three days, Edith had awakened from her dream—she saw something in the man which terrified her, and she wrote a pitiful letter to father, who went over to Paris at once, and finally succeeded in buying the man off. Father paid him fifty thousand francs, I believe—perhaps it was the fact that he knew he was not really Edith's husband—that he himself had committed a crime—which made him take it. He agreed to leave the country, and in the following December he wrote father that he was about to sail for Martinique in a ship called the *Centaur*. He said

he intended to buy a plantation at Martinique and make that his home. In February, we learned that the *Centaur* had been lost, with all on board. After eight years, it seemed certain that he was dead, and Edith felt free to marry again."

"Was Mr. Delroy informed of this early indiscretion?"

"Certainly—and forgave it, as any good man would."

"Pardon me for asking the question, Miss Croydon; but it was necessary. When was it you first learned that Tremaine was still alive?"

"One night nearly two months ago, Edith brought his letter to me. She was wild, distracted, ready to kill herself—that is what I have feared every day since. She loves Mr. Delroy, Mr. Godfrey; and yet she believed herself the wife of another man. He demanded that she meet him in that apartment house. I knew she could not bear such a meeting, and yet he must be seen. I offered to go in her stead; I had some wild idea of appealing to his better nature, of persuading him——"

She stopped, silenced by her own emotion.

"That, of course, would not have altered the fact that your sister was his wife," observed Godfrey.

"No; that was the terrible part of it; nothing could alter that. There must, of course, be a separation; but we thought we would solve that problem after we had settled the other. So I went. He opened the door for me. I had never seen him, and I confess his appearance and manner were not at all what I expected. He did not look in the least like a scoundrel,

nor did he act like one. He listened to me with attention and seeming respect. He even appeared moved Oh, I know now what a hypocrite he was; I know that he was laughing at me; that he was planning something deeper, more villainous. I had brought twelve hundred dollars with me,—all that we could gather together at the moment,—and I pressed it upon him, urging him to take it and go away and we would send him more. He pretended to refuse the money, to protest that that was not in the least what he wanted, but I compelled him to take it. And just as I was hoping that I had prevailed with him, the door of the bedroom opened and a horrible drunken man staggered out.

"'Well, Vic,' he cried, 'so this is th' gal, is it? She's a likely piece. I wouldn't give her up, Vic, no, not fer ten thousand——'

"'Go back to bed, you drunken brute!' cried Tremaine, and took him roughly by the arm.

"But the other shook him off.

"'Don't lay your hands on me, Vic!' he cried. 'Don't dare lay your hands on me!'

"I saw a very devil spring into Tremaine's face. He looked about him for some weapon, and picked up a piece of pipe that lay beside the radiator. Thompson saw the action and lurched heavily toward him.

"'Goin' t' use that on me, Vic?' he asked. 'You'd better try it,' and he made a pass at Tremaine and tried to snatch the pipe away. 'You try it on an' I'll blow your game like I did once before down at Sydney.'

"He struck at Tremaine again, but the latter sprang away and in an instant had brought the pipe down upon his head. Thompson fell like a log; then that fiendish look flashed into Tremaine's face a second time; he snatched out a revolver—I dimly understood what was coming—indeed, I had my own revolver in my hand—and I fired at him; but my shot went wild, while his——"

She stopped and buried her face in her hands, overcome for the moment by the terrible spectacle her words had evoked.

She controlled herself by an effort; took down her hands . . .

"He put his pistol away and stepped over very close to me.

"'Miss Croydon,' he said rapidly, 'it will be well for you to say you did not know me. I have committed no crime—he was the aggressor—what I did was done in self-defence. One thing more—your sister has nothing to fear from me—I shall never bother her again—I promise you that.'

"He was gone in an instant and then the janitor came and you and the detectives."

Godfrey nodded thoughtfully.

"That supplies the motive, Lester," he said. "I have felt that my explanation of the crime was not quite adequate. But it was not only desire for revenge that urged Tremaine on—it was also the knowledge that Thompson knew of his first marriage and threatened, with a word, to wreck his plans a second time."

"Yes," she [illegible], and sat [illegible], pondering the story.

"Why did you take the clippings, Miss Croydon?" asked Godfrey after a moment.

"From what you read of them, I suspected how vitally they concerned my sister. That was a secret, I felt, which must be kept at any hazard. It was done without consideration, on the spur of the moment, or I should never have had the courage to do it at all."

"And why did you hide them under the carpet?"

She laughed outright—the load was lifted—she was fast becoming her usual self.

"I had a wild idea that you were going to search me. I saw that loose place in the carpet the instant I arose with the clippings in my hand. Once I had put them there, I had no chance at all to get them again."

Godfrey nodded.

"You tried to get them the day after the inquest, didn't you?"

"Yes; but the janitor was so afraid of me that he wouldn't even let me go upstairs."

"And there weren't any papers?"

"No; that was a lie. I saw I must invent one—that I must offer some explanation of my presence there."

"Did Tremaine keep his promise?"

"Not to bother my sister? Yes; he mentioned it again only to assure me that the past was dead—that he would never revive it."

"But how could you admit his presence here?"

"How could we prevent it? It was Mr. Delroy

who brought him. We weren't strong enough to tell him the whole story."

"You mean you told him part of it?"

"There has been a virtual separation ever since Mr. Tremaine appeared."

Godfrey paused reflectively.

"Why were you so agitated," he continued finally, "when you were asked to identify Jimmy the Dude at the inquest?"

"Because I did identify him."

"You did?"

"Yes—as the man I had seen talking to the janitor in the lower hall. Let me explain, Mr. Godfrey. When I was asked suddenly for a description of the murderer, I was taken aback; I endeavoured to think, to collect myself—and I remembered the man I had passed in the hall. Without stopping to consider—wishing only to disarm suspicion—I described him roughly as I remembered him. When I was confronted with him at the inquest next day, I instantly realised what I had done—I had implicated an innocent man—and it turned me a little faint for a moment."

"Had you ever met him?"

"Met him?" she repeated in surprise. "Why, no."

"But he seemed to know you."

"Oh!" and she laughed again. "I had a letter from him next day—a letter filled with gratitude—touching even. It seems that my sister and I had helped his family—a mother and sister—without knowing it, while he was away—"

"At Sing-Sing—he's the most expert burglar in

New York, but he's got his good points, too—witness his taking Thompson home that night."

"Yes—he wanted to do anything he could to help me. I intend to look up Jimmy."

"Do—if you can reform him, the New York police force will be mighty grateful."

"I'm going to try," she said, and I rather envied Jimmy.

Godfrey leaned back in his chair with a sigh of satisfaction.

"I think that clears up that affair pretty well," he said: "and that brings us to the second and more serious one. And first, Miss Croydon, I want to ask you if you think it was just the right thing to let them march Jack Drysdale off to prison when a single word from you might have saved him?"

CHAPTER II

A Gathering of Threads

"FROM me?" repeated Miss Croydon blankly. "A single word from me? I do not understand you, Mr. Godfrey."

"Do you mean to say," demanded Godfrey with emphasis, "that you do not know where Mr. Drysdale was Monday night; that you were not yourself the cause of his leaving the house?"

She was staring at him with distended eyes.

"I the cause!" she repeated hoarsely, after a moment. "Mr. Godfrey, I will tell you something, of which I had determined never to speak. When he left the house that evening, he deliberately broke an appointment he had made with me—an appointment which he had prayed for. He had happened to hear Mr. Tremaine make certain proposals to me—in short"—she hesitated, and then proceeded steadily, with raised head—"I may as well tell the whole truth. Since the evening of that first tragedy, Mr. Tremaine has been persecuting me with his attentions. At the time, I thought them merely insulting—I see now that he may have been in earnest."

"I don't in the least doubt that he was in earnest," agreed Godfrey. "Mr. Drysdale, then, overheard him ask you to be his wife?"

"Yes—just that."

"But he also heard you refuse, no doubt?"

"Oh, yes," she said, smiling and colouring a little; "he heard me refuse in the most positive way; but my refusal provoked Mr. Tremaine to an intemperance of language which Mr. Drysdale resented and which he thought I should have resented, too. He demanded that I explain to him Mr. Tremaine's position, and I promised to do so on the very evening he—he stayed away from the house. His staying away offended me deeply."

Godfrey had listened with intent eyes and a quick nod from time to time.

"There is only one point lacking," he said. "Did Tremaine know of your intention to tell Drysdale the story?"

"Yes—he even charged me with that intention."

"Ah—he had listened at a keyhole, probably."

"He said that Mr. Drysdale himself had told him. I might add, Mr. Godfrey, that I met Mr. Drysdale and the officers in the hall that morning, as they were going away, and I implored him to tell them where he had been. He answered me with such insult and contempt that I thought he must be mad."

"And no wonder! You were playing at cross-purposes. I presume, then, that it was not you who wrote Mr. Drysdale this note?" and he handed her the crumpled sheet of paper he had fished from Drysdale's waste-basket.

She took it with trembling hand; already beginning to suspect, perhaps, what it contained.

"'Be at the pergola at nine,'" she read. "'If I am late, wait for me. G.' I certainly never wrote

any such note as that, Mr. Godfrey. Where did it come from?"

"Is it in your handwriting?"

"Why, yes," she answered, looking at it more closely. "That is, it is something like. Oh! I begin to see!" she cried, and I saw her seized with a sudden convulsive shuddering.

"Yes," said Godfrey, "it was a pretty plot. This note lured him from the house, and kept him away until the storm came up and he was forced to abandon the hope of meeting you. He concluded that you were playing with him—when he returned to the house, he found that you had spent the evening with Tremaine – afterwards, in his room, he did a number of violent and foolish things. Finally, he determined to go away; he started to pack his belongings—and then, in the hall, you, as he thought, added insult to injury by asking him to tell——"

She stopped him with a wild gesture.

"Oh, I must see him!" she cried. "Something must be done——"

"Something shall be done," Godfrey assured her, rising. "The real culprit shall be in custody to night."

"The real culprit?" The words arrested her attention.

"Who but Tremaine?"

"Tremaine? But he was in the house—as you know, I talked with him for a long time."

"In the same vein?"

She coloured a little at the tone.

"Yes," she answered. "You will, perhaps, think

me weak, Mr. Godfrey; but despite his villainy, there was a fascination, a sort of brutal power, about the man, which it was very hard to resist. And then, I believed that Mr. Drysdale had deliberately broken his engagement with me. Otherwise, I should not have given Mr. Tremaine another opportunity to—to——"

She did not attempt to finish the sentence—there was no need that she should. I have often wondered, since, what the end would have been had Fate not interfered—had Tremaine's plan worked itself out as he intended. Remembering both of them—man and woman—I think she must have yielded in the end; submitted; gone with him out into the world to conquer it . . .

"There's no questioning Tremaine's fascination," agreed Godfrey, "nor his ability; yet I fancy that in spite of his precautions we've got him fast in the net. That is all, I think."

"One thing more, Mr. Godfrey," she said; "do you think we'd better tell Mr. Delroy the story?"

"Yes," answered Godfrey decidedly. "Tell him the whole story. That's always the best way and the safest. Remember, your lack of frankness has already cost one human life. Your sister has incurred no guilt; she has committed no fault. Her husband will have nothing to forgive."

"And the public?"

"The public? What has the public to do with it?"

"But I thought—you see—you——"

"Oh, you thought I would write it up in the *Record?* I have no such intention, Miss Croydon. I shall let

that first tragedy rest—this second one will be enough and, after all, Tremaine has only one life for the law to take."

"Pardon me," she said quickly, holding out her hand. "I see I have offended you. You must forgive me."

"Oh, I do," he said, taking her hand and smiling into her eyes—allowing himself a moment's reward. "Even a yellow journalist, Miss Croydon, has his reticences. That's hard to believe, isn't it?"

"Not when one knows them," she answered, and opened the door for us.

Thomas was waiting in the hall.

"Anything else, sir?" he asked.

"No," said Godfrey. "We've finished here. Now let us have our trap."

We stopped a moment in the library to say good-bye to Delroy. He came forward eagerly to meet us.

"Well?" he asked. "Can you clear Jack?"

"Yes," said Godfrey, "we can. What's more, we will."

"Thank God!" and Delroy passed his hand across his forehead. "This whole thing has been a sort of terrible nightmare to me, Mr. Godfrey. I'm hoping that I may even yet wake up and find that it was all only a dream."

Godfrey smiled a little bitterly.

"I'm afraid you won't do that, Mr. Delroy," he said; "but, at least, I believe you'll find that, in the end, it will sweep a great unhappiness out of your life. And I'm sure that, with Mr. Lester's help, I can clear Drysdale."

Thomas came to tell us that our trap was waiting, and Delroy went down the steps with us.

"I hope to have you here some time under more favourable circumstances," he said, and shook us both warmly by the hand.

Evening had come, and the darkness deepened rapidly as we drove back along the road to Babylon.

"We can't get a train till 8.42," said Godfrey, "so we'll have dinner at the hotel and then go around for a talk with our client. I think we have some news that will cheer him up."

"It seemed to me," I observed, "that it was not at all about his arrest that he was worrying."

"It wasn't," agreed Godfrey. "That's what I meant."

The lights of Babylon gleamed out ahead, and a few minutes later we drew up before the hotel. As we entered the office, I saw the proprietor cast a quick glance at a little fat man, with a round face, who had been leaning against the cigar-stand, and who immediately came forward to meet us.

"I am Coroner Heffelbower," he said, with an evident appreciation of his own importance. "I believe you are t'e gentlemen who represent Mr. Drysdale?"

"Mr. Lester, here, of Graham & Royce, will represent Mr. Drysdale," explained Godfrey. "I am merely one of his friends."

"The inquest, I believe, is set for to-morrow morning at ten o'clock?" I asked.

"Yes, sir; t'ough we shall hardly get to t'e evidence

before afternoon. T'e morning will be spent in looking ofer t'e scene of t'e crime."

"I understand," said Godfrey, with studied artlessness, "that you have found the missing necklace."

The coroner flushed a little; evidently that was a sore subject.

"No, sir," he answered, "we haven't found it. I haf about come to t'e conclusion t'at Drysdale t'rew it into t'e bay."

"But," I objected, "he'd hardly have committed a murder in order to gain possession of it, only to throw it away!"

"He would, if my t'eory iss right, sir," returned the coroner, with some spirit.

"What is your theory?" I asked.

"No matter; no matter," and he was fairly bloated with self-importance. "You will see to morrow."

Godfrey was looking at him, his eyes alight with mirth.

"I see," he broke in. "Accept my compliments, Mr. Heffelbower. It is the only theory which fits the case. Don't you understand, Lester? Here's a young man of wealth, who deliberately goes out and kills a man, steals a necklace and throws it into the ocean. He attempts to establish no alibi; he refuses to answer any questions; after the murder he rages around in his room and breaks things; he insults the girl he's engaged to; quarrels with his best friend. Why, it's as plain as day! A man who would behave like that must be—"

"Crazy!" cried the coroner, beaming with satisfaction. "I could not haf put t'e case better myself, sir!"

And Godfrey gravely bowed his thanks at the compliment.

CHAPTER III

Godfrey and I are "de Trop"

HEFFELBOWER insisted that we join him in an appetiser; he had evidently jumped to the conclusion that Godfrey was a famous New York detective, and he gazed at him with respect and a little awe. He wanted to discuss again all the details of the tragedy, but we got rid of him, after a while, and went in to dinner. Then we started toward the jail for a final talk with Drysdale. Another jailer had come on duty, but he made no difficulty about admitting us.

"Well?" asked the prisoner, as soon as we were alone.

"Oh," said Godfrey, regarding him with a good-humoured smile, "you won't be electrocuted this time—though I must say you deserve it!"

"What!" cried Drysdale, colouring suddenly. "You don't believe——"

"That you killed Graham? Oh, no, but you've made an unmitigated ass of yourself, my friend. Did you have a pleasant time, Monday night, kicking your heels by the hour together, out at the pergola?"

Drysdale flushed again, but this time it was with anger.

"Oh! so she told you, did she?" he asked between

his te "I dare say you had a good laugh together over

"Jack," said Godfrey calmly, "I protest you are becoming more and more asinine! Haven't you sense enough to see that that note—by the way, how was it delivered to you?"

"I found it on my dressing table when I came back from New York Monday evening. What are you driving at, Godfrey? If you've discovered anything, for God's sake, tell me straight out!"

"I've discovered an unusually large consignment of humble pie awaiting your consumption. You don't deserve a magnificent girl like that, Jack; I swear you don't. Do you remember your last words to her?"

"Yes," answered Drysdale, with a sudden flushing of the cheeks. "And she deserved them. She got me out of the house and spent the evening with Tremaine. It was an indirect way of telling me that she was tired of me. I'd suspected it before!"

Godfrey looked at him pityingly.

"Really, Jack," he said, "I'm half inclined to think the coroner's right in his theory, after all."

"What is his theory?"

"He thinks you're crazy."

Drysdale laughed a little mirthless laugh.

"Perhaps he's right," he said.

"You'll be sure of it in a few minutes. It's inconceivable that any man in his right mind should suspect a girl like Miss Croydon of such a thing."

Drysdale turned to him with eyes bright with emotion.

"See here, Jim," he said; "you've had your fun;

you've tormented me long enough. Do you mean that Miss Croydon didn't write the note?"

"I mean just that."

"Then who did?"

"Tremaine!"

The word brought Drysdale to his feet like a thunder-clap.

"Do you mean," he demanded, gripping his hands tig'ht behind him, "that Tremaine wrote the note and placed it in my room in order to get me out of the house?"

"I do."

"And that Miss Croydon knew nothing about it?"

"Not a thing—she was waiting for you in the house. She thought you'd deliberately broken an appointment you'd made with her."

Drysdale ground his teeth together and struck himself a savage blow in the chest.

"Good God!" he groaned. "What a fool! What a perfect, muckle-headed fool!"

"Go on," laughed Godfrey. "Do it again—sackcloth and ashes! You deserve it all!"

"Deserve it! Do you think she'll ever forgive me?"

"I shouldn't if I were in her place," Godfrey assured him. "I'd think myself well rid of you. I shouldn't want to marry an idiot."

Drysdale cursed dismally to himself.

"Still," Godfrey added, "there's no accounting for the whims of women—there's no telling what they'll do. Maybe, after this, you'll come nearer appreciating her as she deserves."

"Appreciating her!"

"You don't seem to have any curiosity as to how we're going to save that precious neck of yours," Godfrey observed.

"Oh, damn my neck! What do I care! Godfrey, I've got to see her right away—I've got to get down on my knees—crawl in the dust——"

"That's it!" nodded Godfrey approvingly. "You've caught the idea. You ought to feel like an insect—a particularly small one. But I hardly believe the jailer will release you on your own recognisance. Maybe, to-morrow after the inquest, if everything goes well——"

"Oh, to-morrow be hanged! I've got to see her right away, Jim! Isn't there any way——"

He was pacing furiously up and down the cell, biting his nails, tearing his hair. Could Tremaine have seen him, then, he might have modified his estimate of him.

"There's no way," said Godfrey, "unless Miss Crovdon herself should commit the inconceivable folly——hello, who's that——"

The outer door had been flung crashing back; there came a rush of feet down the corridor, a swish of skirts . . .

"Grace!"

It was Dr. Dale's voice and he stood there like a man struck suddenly to stone.

And she—I turned a little giddy as I looked at her—at the shining eyes—at the quivering, smiling lips . . .

Godfrey had sprung instantly to his feet.

"Come, Lester," he said, in a voice very gentle, as the jailer opened the cell door, "we must catch our train; we've business in New York."

Perhaps it was only my fancy that his step was not wholly steady as he went before me down the corridor.

CHAPTER IV

The Story of Monday Night

NOT until the regular click-click of the wheels told me that we were well under way did I open my mind to Godfrey; then I spoke with what I deemed a necessary frankness.

"My dear Godfrey," I began, "I've watched you all day, smelling bottles, examining scratches, trying to read faint ink-marks on a blotter, puzzling over a broken cane, and doing various other eccentric things from which you seemed to draw conclusions utterly invisible to me. I've heard you assure both Drysdale and Miss Croydon that the former will be cleared of suspicion at to-morrow's inquest, and that the real culprit will be pointed out. You'll pardon me if I confess to some curiosity as to how all this is to be accomplished."

"Did you see her face as she came through that door, Lester?" he asked, staring absently at the seat in front of us. "I tell you, it warmed the heart of even an old reprobate like me! And to think that we did it!" he added. "To think that we did it!"

"You did it," I corrected. "I was in the chorus to-day—you had the centre of the stage."

"But you don't mind, Lester? I couldn't help it, you know."

"Of course you couldn't—that's where you belong.

But now that the curtain's down and we're alone together with plenty of time to talk, I'd like to understand——"

"And you shall—down to the minutest detail. Let's see—this is the smoker, isn't it? Well, suppose we light up—I can think more clearly when I'm smoking."

"All right; fire away," I said, as soon as the cigars were going.

"Well," began Godfrey; "as I pointed out to you this morning, for good and sufficient reasons, I started out in this investigation with the assumption of Tremaine's guilt."

"Of course," I observed, "you know it is the duty of every jury to start out with exactly the contrary assumption."

"Certainly I know that; but a detective has to work with some definite end in view, or he never gets anywhere. In other words, a detective, after carefully studying the details of any crime, must form a theory concerning it, and must work along that theory. As soon as he discovers any fact that fails to fit with his theory, he must modify it or form another; and he must keep on doing this until he finds the theory which agrees with all the facts—not all but one or two, but with every one. A good many detectives fall into the mistake of being satisfied with the theory which fits most of the facts—a serious error, for the right theory must, of course, inevitably fit them all. That's the scientific method and the only safe one. When a detective hits upon a theory which fits all the known facts, he's got as much right to assume it's true as an

astronomer has or a physicist, who builds up the universe in just the same way."

"But that's a difficult thing to do," I remarked, "to find a theory that fits all the facts."

"Exceedingly difficult sometimes," assented my companion, "because the facts often appear to be entirely contradictory. Really, facts are never contradictory—truth is always truth—the trouble is we can't always tell what is fact and what is fiction. The hardest part of a detective's work is to sift the wheat from the chaff—to get at the meaty, essential facts.

"Well, as you know, I started out with the theory of Tremaine's guilt. More than that, I was morally certain that he was guilty, knowing what I knew of the man. And first of all, it was evident to me that no criminal as careful as he is would run the risk of going through that boathouse and committing a murder on the pier outside with young Graham sleeping on a cot a few feet away. I therefore deduced this bottle. Smell of it."

He uncorked it and held it under my nose.

"Chloroform!" I said.

"Precisely," and he corked it carefully and returned it to his pocket. "The boy's story helped me to arrive at it. He had been awakened by that violent thunder-clap, but for the first moment he had found himself unable to move—dizzy, as he explained it."

"But how did you know where to look for it?" I asked.

"Well, I knew that no experienced criminal would

keep about him any such important evidence as a bottle that had contained chloroform. The odour clings to it for a long time. I committed the mistake, at first, of supposing that he had hidden it in the boat-house. I should have known better. Naturally he would throw it into the bay. There was a single chance against me. If he had thrown it in uncorked, it would probably have sunk. That was a point he didn't think of, and by just that much he fell below perfection. I think he probably administered the chloroform by pouring it upon one corner of the sheet and throwing it over young Graham's face. No doubt the odour would have been perceptible next morning had anyone thought to look for it. There was only one point in the whole case," he added thoughtfully, "that was utterly at variance with my theory—and it worried me badly for a time."

"What was that?" I asked.

"That was the story the jailer told us—that Miss Croydon believed Drysdale guilty. But you have seen how naturally that was explained. I knew then, in that instant, that I was on the right track—that nothing could defeat me. But let us go back to the beginning—and I'd like you to point out any flaws you see in the story."

"Very well," I said, and settled back in the seat to listen.

"Tremaine had two very powerful motives for the commission of this crime," began Godfrey; "he needed money and could take no more from Miss Croydon, since he was trying seriously to win her affection; he was determined to get Drysdale out of

the way under circumstances as discreditable as possible, confident that, in that case, he would himself win Miss Croydon. Which," he added, in a thoughtful aside, "from what you've told me of him, I don't think at all impossible."

"Not in the least," I agreed. "I believe Tremaine could win any woman he really set his heart on."

"At any rate, he learns of Drysdale's jealousy and of Miss Croydon's promise to explain things. He sees that at any hazard he must prevent that explanation. Monday morning, he comes to town with Delroy, and the latter tells him that he intends giving the necklace the salt-water treatment. You'll remember it was Tremaine who originally proposed this, though he could scarcely at that time have foreseen what would come of it."

"Mere chance," I nodded.

"Well, Tremaine takes the early train back to Edgemere and lays his plans. He writes the note——"

"But you really haven't any evidence that he did," I objected.

For answer Godfrey took from his pocket the blotter he had found in Tremaine's room.

"I told you that these letters aren't in Tremaine's hand," he said; "but if you'll compare them with the note, you'll see how nearly they resemble Miss Croydon's. Again, they are only capital B's, G's, and I's, which are the only capitals used in the note. That's pretty good circumstantial evidence. Tremaine, of course, burnt the piece of paper he practiced on; but he didn't think to burn this blotter. It

was only the freshest line at the bottom of the paper that left these marks."

"But did Tremaine have a sample of Miss Croydon's writing?"

"There's no reason to think he didn't have; but if he didn't, he could no doubt have found plenty of samples among Drysdale's things. He's probably an adept at forgery as well as at most other branches of crime."

"All right; go ahead," I said.

"Tremaine writes the note and leaves it in Drysdale's room," continued Godfrey. "Then he opens the trunk and secures the revolver. Perhaps he knew the revolver was there and perhaps he didn't. If he hadn't found it, he'd probably have taken something else belonging to Drysdale for a weapon.

"Having secured the revolver, he returns to his room by way of the balcony. What passed in the early part of the evening you already know. Drysdale goes to keep the rendezvous at the pergola, starting early, because the house, with Tremaine in it, has become unbearable to him. He stops for a chat with Graham, which the latter's son overhears, and then goes on to the pergola, which is quite at the other end of the grounds from the boathouse.

"Meanwhile, Tremaine has spent the early part of the evening talking with Delroy and Miss Croydon. At last he goes to his room on the pretence of writing letters, gets the revolver, lets himself down by the vine, and starts for the pier. He enters the boathouse softly, feels his way to the cot, whose position he has already seen, and carefully administers the chloroform.

The dose was no doubt nicely calculated and the boy would probably have awakened naturally in a few hours.

"That done, Tremaine walks boldly out upon the pier. Old Graham sees him; perhaps challenges him; but of course allows him to approach as soon as he recognises him. They talk together for a moment; then Tremaine, swift as lightning, knocks the other down. Graham probably fell without crying out. I fancy I can see Tremaine pausing to make sure his victim is dead before he goes on to the end of the pier to get the necklace."

I shivered; I could see him, too, bending over in the darkness, with a horrible calmness . . .

"That throwing of the pistol into the boat," continued Godfrey, "was one of those flashes of inspiration which come to a man sometimes. It was superb! It proves that our friend is really an artist. Not one man in a thousand would have thought of it. He must have laughed with sheer satisfaction when he heard it clatter safely into the boat."

He paused for a moment to think of it, to turn it over, to taste it.

"Well," he continued, at last, "he secures the necklace, throws away the bottle, and probably goes down to the water's edge to wash his hands."

"Did he take the necklace with him to the house?" I asked.

"No," said Godfrey decidedly. "There was no reason whatever for him to run that risk. He had doubtless picked out a safe hiding-place for it in the afternoon. The necklace once deposited there, he

hurries back to the house, climbs up to the balcony, and re-enters his room. He assures himself that there are no blood-stains on him anywhere, then he moves his table near the window and sits down to wait for Drysdale's return.

"As soon as he hears him enter his room, he gathers up the letters which he had, of course, written during the afternoon, and goes downstairs. And it is here that he makes his most serious mistake. He fancies, perhaps, that he is to have only the country police to deal with—only your Heffelbowers—that he must clinch the nail, that he cannot make the evidence against his victim too strong. So, when he places his letters in the bag on the hall-rack, he also tears off the top button of Drysdale's rain-coat.

"He returns to the hall, talks with Delroy; the storm comes up and young Graham rushes in. They run down to the pier, kneel beside the body, try to discover signs of life and Tremaine adroitly shuts the button within the dead man's hand. That, my dear Lester, is, I fancy, the whole story."

I smoked on for a moment in silence, turning it over in my mind with a certain sense of disappointment.

"It may be true," I said. "It seems to hold together. But, after all, there isn't a bit of positive evidence in it. How are we to convince a jury that Tremaine really did all these things?"

Godfrey blew a great smoke ring out over the seat in front of us.

"I agree," he said, "that we haven't as yet any direct evidence against Tremaine; it may be that this whole structure will fall to pieces about my ears. But

I don't believe it. I believe, within an hour, we'll be in possession of the one piece of positive, indisputable evidence that will outweigh all the rest."

"What is that?" I asked.

He turned to me with that bright light in his eyes that I had seen there once or twice before.

"The necklace," he answered.

CHAPTER V

A Horror in the Dark

THE necklace; of course, the necklace!

"But then," I objected after a moment, "if your theory's correct, we're going right away from the necklace. You said that Tremaine had hidden it at Edgemere."

"Yes; but he's no such fool as to come away and leave it hidden there. He's not the man to make the mistake Miss Croydon made—to conceal a thing in a place where he can't get it again without exciting suspicion. No, no; he took the necklace with him to New York; he ran no risk in doing that; everything had happened just as he hoped it would. There was absolutely no suspicion against him."

"He may have hidden it somewhere else in the meantime," I observed.

"Yes, he may have done that," admitted Godfrey; "and yet, why should he? He has no reason to believe that any suspicion attaches to him. He'll naturally wish to keep the pearls by him until he has a chance to sell them, one by one. He can't do that yet—he'll probably arrange a trip to Europe to get rid of them. If the necklace is concealed at all, it's concealed somewhere in his rooms. And if it's there, we'll find it!"

"Long Island City!" yelled the guard, slamming open the door. "Change for New York!"

We took the Thirty-fourth Street ferry, and ten minutes later were in a cab hurrying downtown.

"We'll get Simmonds first," said Godfrey. "I've a sort of reciprocity treaty with him. Besides, we've got to have an officer to make the arrest. Here we are."

He jumped out, paid the driver, and hastened up the steps, I after him. As we entered the room, I saw that a clock registered half-past ten.

"Hello, Simmonds," said Godfrey, to a grizzled, stockily built man, who had sprung to his feet as we entered. "All alone?"

"Yes—the other boys have turned in."

"That's good—I've got something big for you."

Simmonds's face flushed with sudden emotion.

"Really?" he stammered. "Have you really?"

"The biggest catch that's been made in many a day. But remember our agreement—yours the glory, mine the scoop. Not a word of this to anybody before daybreak."

"Of course not; of course not," assented Simmonds, rubbing his hands together eagerly. "What is it?"

"You've read about that murder and robbery at the Delroy place near Babylon?"

"Yes, certainly; they've got the murderer in jail down there."

"No, they haven't," retorted Godfrey sharply. "We're going to have him in jail here inside of twenty minutes."

Simmonds's eyes began to glisten.

"That *would* be a big thing," he said. "Are you sure of the man?"

"Dead sure; but see here, Simmonds. I haven't time to tell you the whole story now; only I assure you, on my word, that I've evidence against the man which will convict him of one murder and perhaps of two. Is that enough?"

"Yes," said Simmonds instantly, and he opened a drawer, from which he took a pistol and a pair of handcuffs. "All right," he added, turning back to us.

"That's good! Better have a lantern, too, though."

"Think so?"

He took down a little dark lantern, lighted it, tested it, and put it in his pocket.

"Now I'm ready. Have we far to go?"

"Oh, no; just across the street."

Simmonds started with astonishment.

"You don't mean the Marathon!" he said.

"Just that."

"But who is it we're going after?"

"A fellow named Tremaine."

"Tremaine!" Simmonds's face grew blanker and blanker. "Why, I know him: he's been in here to see me. He doesn't seem at all the kind of fellow who would . . ."

"So ho!" cried Godfrey. "It was you who told him about the clippings!"

Simmonds coloured to the eyes.

"Who told you that?" he stammered.

"No matter; it didn't do any harm; played right into our hands, in fact. But you didn't show your usual perspicacity there, Simmonds. That fellow is the most remarkable scoundrel I've ever run across

—perhaps it's just as well I never met him, or he'd have hypnotised me, too. Come along."

Simmonds followed meekly. Evidently he felt his indiscretion deeply; though I didn't think him greatly to blame. Who, to look at him, would have conceived any suspicion of Tremaine? Even yet, I found it difficult to believe him guilty of any crime; this chain which Godfrey had so laboriously forged about him—would it really hold—was it really strong in every link? Or was there some fatal weakness in it, some unsuspected flaw . . .

Higgins was just shutting the inner doors. He recognized Simmonds at once.

"Hello," he said; "what's up now? No more murders, I hope?"

"Do you know whether or not Mr. Tremaine is in his rooms?" asked Godfrey.

"Yes, sir; he went up about an hour ago."

"You have a key to his door?"

"Yes, sir."

"We want you to go up with us and open the door."

"Oh, come!" protested Higgins. "That's going it pretty strong. What's Mr. Tremaine done?"

"No matter. There's no use holding off, Higgins. Simmonds here can place you under arrest and force you to go."

"Well, see here," said Higgins, turning a little pale, "if you break in on him like that, there's apt t' be some bullets flyin' around—he's hot-headed, he is! I wish you'd excuse me. Here's the key—why can't you open th' door yourself?"

"That 'll do," assented Godfrey, and took the key. "Now, you stay down here."

"No fear," said Higgins promptly. "Though," he added gloomily, "mebbe I'd better telephone for some ambulances."

We went softly up the stair and down the dimly lighted corridor to Tremaine's door. We could see by the transom that the room was dark.

"I want to surprise him," whispered Godfrey. "If he has two or three minutes' warning, he may be able to get rid of some evidence. He's probably in bed and we must get to the bedroom door without his hearing us. How does the bedroom door lie, Lester, with reference to this one?"

"Straight ahead," I answered hoarsely.

"That's good; are you ready?"

"Yes," said Simmonds, and cocked his revolver.

As for me, I grasped my stick more firmly, glad that it was a stout one.

"All right," said Godfrey, and he threw back the bolt and opened the door.

The room was in absolute darkness, save for the dim stream of light from the hall. We entered cautiously, Godfrey in the lead.

"Have your lantern ready, Simmonds," he whispered, and I caught the odour of heated metal as Simmonds obeyed the order.

Two, three, four steps we advanced, feeling our way—then I heard a startled cry from Godfrey—an instant's pause . . .

"Quick, Simmonds, quick!" he cried, in a stifled voice. "The lantern!"

Instantly a brilliant band of light shot across the room, wavered, wagged to and fro—then settled upon Godfrey bending above some shapeless object on the floor.

"What is it?" I cried, running to him, shivering with horror.

"It's Tremaine," and he knelt on the floor and stripped back the clothing from the breast. "He's dead," he added after a moment.

"Dead? But why? How?"

He was in pajamas—I can see them yet—striped blue and white . . .

Then I heard Godfrey's voice again.

"My God!" he was saying, with an accent of utter horror. "My God! Bring the light closer, Simmonds!"

I looked down, too. The face was in bright relief now—but was it Tremaine? Could it be Tremaine? That staring, distorted thing, with wide-open mouth? Then my eyes fell on the hand, clasped across the breast . . .

"What is it?" I asked again, inarticulately, frozen with dread. "What has happened?"

I saw Godfrey stand erect with a sudden movement of loathing.

"It's the fer-de-lance!" he said hoarsely. "He's been bitten by it. And it's still loose in the room somewhere!"

CHAPTER VI

Vengeance

IT strikes a chill through me, even yet, to recall the awful horror of that instant. The fer-de-lance—death in a few heartbeats, and such a death!—a death that melts a man into an abomination! For a moment, none of us dared move, scarcely dared breathe, and I saw the band of light from Simmonds's lantern waving uncertainly across the floor, the walls, the ceiling—evidently poor Simmonds did not understand the exact nature of the danger, but only that it was a terrible one. I had a mad impulse to jump, shrieking, for the door, and should probably have done it had that quivering silence endured a moment longer.

"Simmonds, give me your lantern," said Godfrey, with an admirable calmness. "Lester, have your cane ready."

He threw a broad band of light upon the carpet, and keeping carefully within this path, approached the door, felt for the electric button, and switched on the lights.

Half-blinded for an instant, we stood staring at each other, at the floor . . .

"For God's sake," gasped Simmonds, mopping the sweat from his face, "what is it?"

"It's a snake," said Godfrey tersely. "The deadliest in the world. If you don't believe me, look

yonder," and he pointed to the huddled mass on the floor.

I did not look: I was afraid to; I had already seen too much. I was grateful when Godfrey jerked down a curtain and threw it over the body. Then he gave Simmonds the lantern and closed the door, which we had left open when we entered.

"Now," he continued sharply, "there's no use in giving way to our nerves. We're in no danger, but that snake is hid around here somewhere and the first thing for us to do is to find it. Were there two snakes, Lester?"

"No," I answered, as articulately as I could. "I think not: I never saw but one."

"I thought you said Cecily took that one with her."

"So she did—wait: I didn't see it. She had a cover over the cage."

Godfrey's face paled suddenly.

"Good God!" he murmured.

A giddiness seized me; I clutched at a chair for support.

It had been no accident: she had left Fê-Fê behind to avenge her—and what a vengeance! She had not laughed and forgotten!

Then, in a flash, I understood that last strange scene—the change in Cecily, as she stood watching us from the deck of the receding boat, the pressing against the rail, the frantic effort to shout a message to Tremaine—she had relented, she did not wish to kill him, she loved him yet! But of that warning he had caught only a single word . . .

"The bed!" I cried. "The bed!"

"Right!" agreed Godfrey incisively, and walked to the bedroom door. In an instant, the inner room was ablaze with light. He armed himself with one of Tremaine's canes, and together we approached the bed.

"Ready, now," he said, and with a sudden movement, stripped back the covers. But there was nothing under them.

"The pillow, perhaps," he said, and turned it over.

There was a quick movement, a soft hissing, a vicious head raised itself, two eyes of orange fire glared at us . . .

I heard the swish of Godfrey's cane, and the head fell. Fê-Fê would work no more evil.

And then, as I looked more closely at the coils, I perceived something else there—something bright, iridescent, glowing . . .

Godfrey lifted the mangled body with the end of his cane and threw it into the middle of the bed. Then he bent over and picked up—the necklace!

"I was sure we should find it here," he said. "But look at it—isn't it beautiful?"

It was more than that—it was superb. Not dead-white, now, but warm, full of life . . . was it the salt bath, or was it that the cloud had been removed forever from its owner's life? As I looked at it, there seemed to be something unearthly in its beauty—it seemed to be rejoicing!

"The snake bit him, probably," added Godfrey thoughtfully, "as he thrust the necklace under the pillow. It was a fitting punishment."

"It was greater than he deserved," I protested hoarsely. "He was not the man to meet a death like that."

"A man! He was a vampire!" said Godfrey sternly. "He lived on the lives of others. Don't let your sentimentalism blind you, Lester."

"Oh, you didn't know him!" I cried. A hot resentment of fate was sweeping over me; I realised that, down at the bottom of my heart, I had never really believed in Tremaine's guilt—even now, I hardly believed in it!

Godfrey turned to Simmonds, who stood contemplating the scene with staring eyes, his lantern still open in his hand.

"It's hard luck, Simmonds," he said. "You're not going to get the glory, after all. But who could have foreseen a thing like this?"

Simmonds opened his mouth and shut it again, without uttering a sound.

"You'd better notify the coroner," continued Godfrey, "and, I suppose, to be strictly regular, I'll have to turn this necklace over to you for the night. Guard it well, Simmonds; it's worth a hundred thousand dollars."

"What!" stammered Simmonds. "Is it the—the—the——"

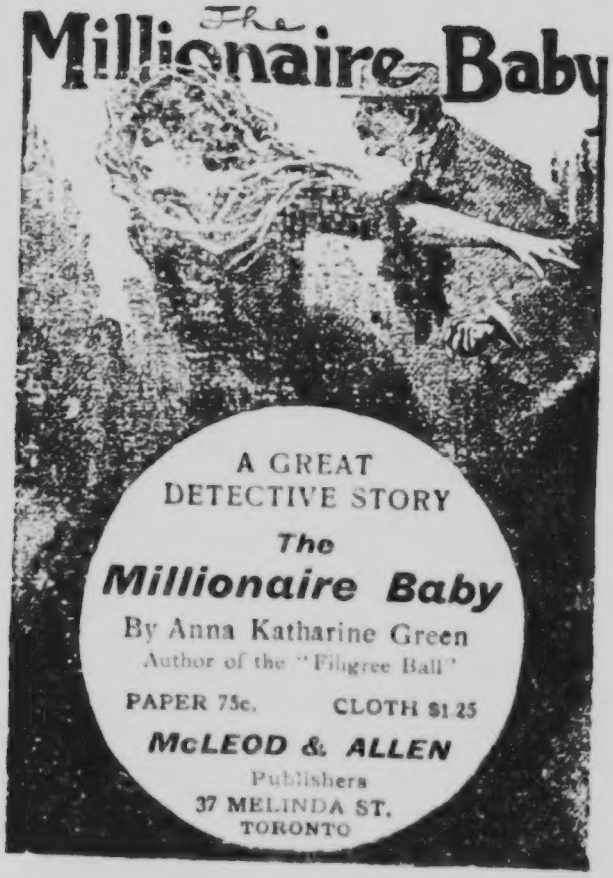
"Yes, it's the Delroy necklace. You'll have to go with us to Babylon in the morning, to attend the inquest. I fancy there'll be something of a sensation when we produce the necklace there—eh, Lester?" and he laughed a grim little laugh of anticipatory triumph.

Then he glanced at his watch.

"I must be going," he said. "I've got to fire this story down to the office. What a scoop it will be! Till to-morrow, gentlemen."

I heard his footsteps die out along the hall; then a sudden horror of the place seized me; a deadly loathing; and I groped my way blindly from the room.

THE END


The Millionaire Baby
A GREAT
DETECTIVE STORY
The
Millionaire Baby
By Anna Katharine Green
Author of the "Filigree Ball"
PAPER 75c.
CLOTH $1 25
McLEOD & ALLEN
Publishers
37 MELINDA ST.
TORONTO

This is the Book Everybody is Talking About

BEVERLY of GRAUSTARK

By Geo. Barr McCutcheon

Author of "GRAUSTARK" and "CASTLE CRANEYCROW"

Illustrated in Colors by HARRISON FISHER

"Beverly is altogether charming—almost living flesh and blood."—*Louisville Times.*

Paper 75 Cents **Cloth $1.25**

At Your Dealers or the Publishers

McLEOD & ALLEN

37 Melinda Street · · TORONTO